

ŽIŽEK'S THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

A Critical Overview

Juri Hiltunen

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Practical Philosophy

Pro Gradu Thesis

May 2020

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Faculty of Social Sciences		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Social and Moral Philosophy, Master's Degree	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Juri Hiltunen			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Žižek's Theory of Ideology – A Critical Overview			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track Practical Philosophy			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Pro Gradu Thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year 05/2020	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 79+3	
<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>By utilizing the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek adds an analysis of unconscious desire to the theory of ideology. By analyzing the terrain of unconsciously structured desires, Žižek attempts to bring the concept of ideology back into contemporary debates and argue that people in fact more ideological than it seems. This thesis analyzes Žižek's theory of ideology and contains a critical account on it. The aims of this thesis are threefold. Firstly, this thesis contains an analytical framework for analyzing Žižek's theory of ideology. Secondly, this thesis introduces Žižek's theory of ideology in a clear manner by employing multiple everyday examples and by minimizing the number of technical concepts. Thirdly, this thesis provides a critical evaluation on his account of ideology criticism in his theory of ideology.</p> <p>In the first main chapter, the framework for analyzing theories of ideology is introduced. The chapter argues that ideologies in general can be analyzed by asking five different questions, which are 1. what is ideology, 2. is ideology good or bad, 3. who is ideological, 4. how and why do ideologies cause things, and 5. what is ideology's context. This framework is combined from various introductory works on ideology and provides a roadmap where different theories of ideology can be placed on, Žižek's theory included. This is done in order to analyze Žižek's theory of ideology in more lucid manner than usually conducted in the commentary literature.</p> <p>In the second main chapter, Žižek's theory of ideology is introduced. According to Žižek, ideology is an illusion of the completeness of the big Other that takes place in subject's unconsciously structured fantasies. The main bulk of the chapter unpacks this technical-sounding definition. At the end of the second main chapter, the analysis returns to the framework of ideology analysis laid down in the first chapter and places Žižek's theory of ideology within this framework in order to summarize his theory of ideology in a condensed, clear, and analytical fashion.</p> <p>The third critical chapter provides an evaluation on the question if Žižek's theory constitutes a credible critical theory of ideology. The novelty of the chapter is the systematization of criticisms against his immanent account of ideology critique. On the one hand, his theory of ideology strives to set up a possibility of immanent critique of ideology; on the other hand, his theory does not fulfill the criteria required for it. This chapter elaborates on three criteria of immanent critique and argues that Žižek fails all three criteria because of three reasons. Firstly, his theory lacks a robust epistemological justification. Secondly, his theory strikes as a self-undermining theory. Thirdly, he does not provide any normative criterion why some ideologies would be better than others. Lastly, the thesis suggests a possible Žižekian answer to the criticisms and points out a direction for future research.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Slavoj Žižek Theory of ideology Ideology Psychoanalysis			
Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat –Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors Kristian Klockars			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited E-thesis			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Framework of ideology analysis.....	5
2.1 What is ideology?	5
2.2 Is ideology good or bad?.....	7
2.3 Who is ideological?	9
2.4 How and why do ideologies cause things?	11
2.5 What is ideology's context?.....	14
2.6 The table of ideology analysis.....	16
3. Žižek's theory of ideology	18
3.1 Žižek's theory of language.....	19
3.2 The master signifier is unconscious	24
3.3 Genesis of subjectivity and desire	27
3.4 What is ideology in Žižek's theory?.....	32
3.5 What does ideology cause in Žižek's theory?.....	36
3.6. Context of ideology: Neoliberalism	40
3.7 Žižek's table of ideology	47
4. Criticism	54
4.1 Immanent critique and Žižek's theory.....	55
4.2 Epistemological criterion.....	59
4.3 Ontological criterion.....	65
4.4 Normative criterion	66
4.5 Žižekian answers to criticisms	68
5. Conclusions	72
6. Bibliography	75

1. Introduction

Slavoj Žižek has been referred as the Elvis of cultural theory and is one of the most widely known living philosophers today (see for example Taylor 2010, 1–5.). His philosophical analysis combines psychoanalysis of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan with the tradition of German idealism, especially with the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (see for example Sharpe 2004, 1). Žižek comments on a myriad of topics such as politics, popular culture, and contemporary philosophical debates. His bibliography contains over 40 books, which range from philosophical analysis of Hegel to psychoanalytic interpretations of Alfred Hitchcock's movies.

The research question of this thesis is “what is Žižek's theory of ideology?”. The topic is important because Žižek has been one of the main forces in the comeback of ideology analysis in social and political theory (see for example Sharpe 2004, 5 & Freeden 2006, 11). By utilizing the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, Žižek adds an analysis of unconscious desire to the theory of ideology. By analyzing the terrain of unconsciously structured desires, Žižek attempts to bring the concept of ideology back into contemporary debates and argue that people in fact more ideological than it seems. This new level of unconsciously structured desires, analyzed psychoanalytically, is Žižek's greatest novelty in discussions on ideology and makes Žižek's theory thus worth analyzing in detail.

Besides laying out Žižek's theory of ideology, this thesis contains an evaluative account on his theory as well. The question of ideology critique is at the core of Žižek's project. Žižek analyzes how ideologies have a grip on subjects, and moreover how one can break free from the grips of ideology. I will argue that Žižek's theory of ideology aims to establish this possibility of critique and emancipation by conducting *immanent critique* of ideology. According to the philosopher Titus Stahl (2013, 2), immanent critique means that standards for the critique are derived from the object criticized and not from any independent standards outside the object of critique. In other words, in the case of Žižek's theory of ideology, the critique of ideology is conducted from *within* the same structure that makes subjects ideological. I will expound upon Žižek's immanent critique and evaluate if his theory constitutes a credible account of immanent critique in the critical chapter of this thesis.

The method of this thesis is philosophical analysis. By utilizing the method of philosophical analysis, I can analyze *how* Žižek thinks, that is how he dissects concepts and their

interrelations in his theory of ideology (on philosophical analysis see Rosenberg 1996, 111). Furthermore, philosophical analysis contains *evaluating* of the argumentation and truth value of theory (Rosenberg 1996, 111–112). In this case, the question is if Žižek's theory of ideology is well argued for and strikes as true or not. Most of Žižek's arguments are not strictly empirical arguments, but rather philosophical, and can thus be evaluated philosophically.

Even though there exists a vast commentary corpus on Žižek, this thesis contains three contributions compared to the literature already published. Firstly, in the commentaries the concept of ideology is usually employed in a similar manner to Žižek and no precise framework has been provided for analyzing his account of ideology in more detail. *In the first main chapter*, I have constructed a framework to analyze Žižek's theory of ideology in a more lucid manner than usually elaborated in the commentaries. This framework is combined from various introductory works on ideology and provides a roadmap where different theories of ideology can be placed on, Žižek's theory included.

Secondly, commentaries on Žižek are usually written in a rather concept-heavy style of philosophy. This style of writing has its audience but might need some habituation for the non-acquainted reader. The second novelty of my thesis is an introduction to Žižek's theory of ideology written in a more clear-cut manner that emphasizes clarity by employing multiple everyday examples and by minimizing the number of technical concepts required when introducing Žižek's multifaceted theory. *In the second main chapter*, I will carry out this introduction to Žižek's theory of ideology. According to Žižek, ideology is an illusion of the completeness of the big Other that takes place in subject's unconsciously structured fantasies. The main bulk of the chapter unpacks this technical-sounding claim by introducing Žižek's Lacanian theory. Unpacking begins by laying out Žižek's Lacanian theory of language, a theory that I consider to be the backbone of his theory of ideology. Secondly, I will introduce the concept of unconscious. Thirdly, I will expound upon Žižek's theory of subjectivity, desire, and fantasy. Only after unpacking these concepts I can finally properly explain Žižek's theory of ideology. Furthermore, I will map out some causes and functions of ideology in Žižek's theory and place his analysis of ideology in the contemporary neoliberal capitalist society. After this introduction to Žižek's theory of ideology, at the end of the second main chapter I will return to the framework of ideology analysis laid down in the first chapter. I will place Žižek's theory of ideology within this framework in order to summarize his theory of ideology in a condensed, clear, and analytical fashion.

In the third main chapter, I will evaluate the critical aspects of Žižek's theory. My third novelty of this thesis is that I will provide three criticisms against his account of ideology criticism in his theory of ideology. There are similar lines of argumentation in the commentary literature as well, but my contribution is that I will systematize these criticisms against his theory in a following fashion: I will argue that his theory of ideology strives to set up a possibility of immanent critique on the one hand but does not fulfill the criteria required for it on the other. Criteria of immanent critique, outlined by Titus Stahl, are what I will label 1. ontological criterion (what there is), 2. epistemological criterion (how does one know there is) and a 3. normative criterion (why should we care). In the critical chapter, I will elaborate on Stahl's criteria and argue that Žižek fails all three criteria because of three reasons. Firstly, his theory lacks a robust epistemological justification. Secondly, his theory of language strikes to me as a self-undermining theory. Thirdly, he does not provide any normative criterion on why some ideologies would be better than others. Lastly, I will provide a few possible Žižekian answers to the criticisms and thus point out a direction for future research.

A few preliminary remarks regarding this thesis are in order. Firstly, because of Žižek's multifold analysis and complexity of his thought, one can approach Žižek's theory from a variety of different perspectives. In this thesis, I have decided to introduce Žižek's analysis by utilizing his Lacanian frame of thought. There might be other possibilities to analyze his body of thought, for example by utilizing Hegelian vocabulary, which is an approach he has himself employed considerably alongside his Lacanian analysis (see for example Žižek 2013). In my opinion, Žižek's Lacanian frame of thought suits better the analysis of unconsciously structured desires in his theory of ideology because Žižek's theory of desire is based on his reading of Lacan. Therefore, I will make Žižek's Lacanian analysis the starting point of my overview on his theory of ideology.

Secondly, Žižek utilizes quite a lot of concepts, jargon if you wish, in his analysis. For clarity's sake, I have minimized the number of technical concepts required for this thesis and attempted to avoid jargon as far as possible. I have added some more technical concepts in the footnotes if the reader wishes to search for more thorough elaborations on some concepts of Žižek's theory that have been left out of this thesis. Moreover, I have provided multiple examples in this thesis in order to clarify Žižek's otherwise complex theory. Because Žižek is often rather difficult to understand, I had to simplify my interpretations of Žižek in this thesis and leave the subtleties of his theory aside. One risks

even oversimplification when trying to condense and rephrase his theory in more plain language, but I consider this a worthwhile prize to pay in order to achieve clarity.

Thirdly, I believe that Žižek's analysis of ideology provides quite a systematic framework. Naturally, there will be other types of interpretations of Žižek as well. It is important to notice that not all commentaries agree with this kind of systematic reading of Žižek (see for example Parker 2004, 116).

Fourthly and lastly, there is a gap in my reading of Žižek. In the last chapter of the thesis, when considering if Žižek's account can be defended against criticisms, I will arrive to the question if Žižek has an ontological theory or not. Here my analysis on Žižek is incomplete because of two reasons. Firstly, Žižek's ontological notes are scattered throughout his massive bibliographical corpus and it would take an immense amount of time and effort to collect and analyze them. Secondly, my readings have focused on the earlier works of Žižek, mainly before the 2000's. I have strived to complete the theoretical picture with more recent commentaries on Žižek, but due to the time limitations of my pro gradu thesis, my theoretical work on Žižek's possible ontology is not conclusive. Therefore, the question remains if his newer works contain an ontological analysis or not. This will be a question for further research.

The main bibliographical sources of this thesis are Žižek's first English book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, which lays down the groundwork of his theory. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* is the most prevalent source in this thesis because of its more systematic, introductory nature. There are many other pieces of his theory excerpted from his other books as well. As for building the framework of ideology analysis, Raymond Geuss' *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (1981) has proven to be invaluable in its analytic insights. The most utilized commentary on Žižek in this work is philosopher Matthew Sharpe's book *Slavoj Žižek – A Little Piece of the Real* (2004), which condenses Žižek's rather difficult language well. Lastly, the criteria of immanent critique are outlined by Titus Stahl in his unpublished working paper *What is Immanent Critique?* (2013). These criteria are utilized in the critical chapter on Žižek's theory of ideology.

2. Framework of ideology analysis

Political theorist Michael Freeden argues in his article *Ideology and political theory* (2006, 3) that the concept of ideology is “the problem child” of political analysis. This is because there is a myriad of different definitions of the concept. In his article, Freeden (2006) goes on to give examples of multiple different uses of ideology. Moreover, in his book *Ideology – An Introduction*, British literary and cultural theorist Terry Eagleton states that (1991, 1–2) he has discovered at least 16 different meanings of the concept in use. The upshot is that the field of ideology analysis is vast and complex because the definition of the concept varies as well.

Because of the complexity of the concept of ideology, in order to analyze Žižek’s account of ideology, I will first construct a framework to distinguish between different theories of ideology. After constructing the framework of ideology analysis, I will place Žižek’s theory of ideology within it in order to clarify his account. I will limit the framework of ideology analysis in this thesis to a few preliminary definitions or aspects of ideology. I will build the framework by utilizing the following questions:

- What is ideology?
- Is ideology good or bad?
- Who is ideological?
- How and why does ideology cause things?
- What is ideology’s context?

2.1 What is ideology?

To begin the mapping, one can firstly ask the “what” question: what is ideology? What kind of things, objects, or entities does the concept of ideology refer to? According to political philosopher Raymond Geuss in *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (1981), there are a few main ways to categorize ideologies. Ideologies can be considered as referring to or containing *discursive* (propositional, conceptual) things, such as beliefs, ideas, and concepts. Moreover, some definitions of ideology include *non-discursive* things, such as habits, rituals, attitudes, forms of artistic activity, and traits of persons or groups. Geuss marks with the symbol “etc.” that the non-discursive list is not exhaustive (Geuss 1981, 5–6). “Non-discursive” here refers not to concepts and propositions, but rather to many kinds of non-lingual action, psychological traits, and behavior.

From this definition alone one can discern that there are many discursive and non-discursive things that the concept ideology can refer to. I would argue, inspired by Geuss (see 1981, 5)¹, that one can define the concept of ideology in a *broad sense* or in a *narrow sense*. For example, one can *narrow down* the scope of ideology analysis to ideology defined as discursive beliefs alone and thus leave the non-discursive things, such as psychological traits and behavior, out of the definition. If one does this, one employs the concept of ideology in a narrow sense.

Ideological beliefs can furthermore be defined in a several different ways. For example, political scientists Terence Ball and Richard Dagger in their book *Ideals and Ideologies* purport that (2016, part 1) ideological beliefs have four different “perhaps indispensable functions for those who subscribe to it”. This list of Ball and Dagger is summarized by Warren Morris (2010, x):

- a) *“They [ideologies] offer an explanation of something socially important*
- b) *Provide some criterion for making evaluative judgments about it*
- c) *Offer social ideals deemed worthy of self[-]identification and*
- d) *Provide a program of social activism to achieve a cultural idea or socially worthy goal.”* (Morris 2010, x)

Other kinds of lists can be produced to define ideological beliefs and distinguish ideological beliefs from any other kinds of beliefs. Therefore, this list is by no means exhaustive (see for example Geuss 1981, 10 & Morris 2010, “Introduction” for another kinds of lists).

The upshot of these kinds of lists is to delineate the scope of ideology when defining the things ideologies are about. For example, in Ball and Dagger’s view my belief “a cat is on a mat” is not an ideological belief *per se*, whereas my belief that “working life makes people miserable, people should oppose working life and work less so they would be happier” is an ideological (set of) belief(s) because it satisfies the conditions listed above. Ball and Dagger’s suggestion is of course merely one example to define the concept of ideology. Defining ideology in this manner only as ideological beliefs is an example of a *narrow* definition of the concept of ideology.

Moreover, one can have *broad* definitions of ideology. For example, Terry Eagleton (1991, 28) points out that sometimes the concept ideology is used similarly as the term

¹ Geuss purports (1981, 5) that when ideology includes not only beliefs and concepts but also psychological dispositions and actions as well, one can call it ideology “in the broad sense”.

“culture” when it refers to all “signifying practices and symbolic processes in a particular society”. The referents of the concept of ideology are wider in these kinds of definitions than in the narrow definitions. One can include both discursive and non-discursive elements in these kinds of broad definitions of ideology. Here ideology refers not only to beliefs and concepts but to traits, actions, habits, etc. as well. When analyzing ideologies, it is important to define if the concept is employed in a broad or in a narrow sense and what kinds of objects, entities, and things does the concept refer to.

Besides the discursive and non-discursive, broad and narrow definitions, one can answer the “what is ideology” question by pointing out what the specific *contents* of ideological beliefs are (see Geuss 1981, 8). For example, someone who holds a capitalist ideology might think that privately owned market economy is the realm of liberty, whereas someone else who holds a communist ideology might consider privately owned market economy to be a system of domination and coercion. One can distinguish between ideological beliefs by analyzing what their contents are about.

To recap this section, one can answer the question of what ideology is by analyzing the concept ideology with three broad main categories:

1. Does ideology refer to *discursive* and/or *non-discursive* elements?
2. Is the definition of ideology *broad* or *narrow*?
3. What are the *contents* of ideological beliefs?

2.2 Is ideology good or bad?

I will proceed to the “good or bad” question: is ideology good or bad? Geuss (1981, 4–26) maps out three different main ways to define ideology here. The first answer employs the concept of ideology in a *descriptive sense*. When the concept is used in a descriptive sense, one does not make a *judgement* on it (Geuss 1981, 5). Ideology is thus considered a descriptive term. In descriptive use, when asked if ideology is good or bad, the answer is “I do not take a stand on the question”. Eagleton has a similar definition (1991, 28) when he argues that when one defines ideology as culture in general, one does not make a judgment on goodness or badness and wrongness or rightness of ideology². Descriptive

² Eagleton phrases this (1991, 28) that when the concept of ideology is used similarly to the concept of culture, the meaning of the concept is “politically and epistemologically neutral”.

uses of the concept bracket out the questions of goodness, badness, rightness and wrongness.

One can define ideology as something bad as well. According to Geuss (1981, 12), the second broad manner to categorize ideologies is to define the concept of ideology in a *pejorative sense*. This definition of ideology holds that ideologies are, by definition, a negative thing, and agents (i.e. groups or individuals) in the society who hold ideologies are somehow deluded. Geuss states (1981, 12) that when the concept of ideology is employed pejoratively, it is used in a *critical* sense, for the aim is to demonstrate to the deluded agents that they indeed are deluded and furthermore analyze the reasons why they are deluded. By doing this analysis, the point is to free them from this delusion. One example of a pejorative use, usually attributed to the Marxist analysis of ideology (according to philosopher and social theorist Jan Rehmann 2013, 5) is the Marxist claim about false consciousness, according to which people wrongly subject to “alienated forms of domination [of capitalism]” rather than pursue their real interests. For example, a worker may think that the best profit for the company is for the best for her as well even though this might not in reality be the case because of the money-grabbing investors.

Eagleton (1991, 29–30) has again quite similar definitions in pejorative vein when he purports that the concept of ideology can mean ideas and beliefs that are legitimized by distortion, mystification or dissimulation. Usually when people utter sentences such as: “oh, he is so ideological, do not believe him!” these utterances hold the idea that ideology gets something wrong; ideology distorts the truth about matters at hand or does not represent them truthfully. Inspired by Eagleton (compare 1991, 5)³, I argue that there are at least three different kinds of deceptions. Firstly, there are illegitimate universalizations (i.e. over-generalizing), for example an argument: “I am a human being who loves metal music. Therefore, every human being loves metal music!”. Secondly there are untruthful naturalizations (i.e. falsely arguing that some *X* is natural, and usually by extension good)⁴, for example a claim: “it is natural and therefore good for people to love metal music!”. Thirdly there are bogus essentializations (i.e. supposing some *Y* as a necessary property of some *X* even if it is in fact not true), for example in the claim: “it is in the

³ Eagleton maps out different methods by which a dominant power can legitimate itself. Eagleton’s list includes naturalization and universalization as well as many other methods of legitimation (Eagleton 1991, 5). The examples in this thesis are mine.

⁴ This example was inspired by Karl Marx who criticizes false essentializations of man’s nature in his text *A Critique of The German Ideology* (2000).

human essence to love metal music!”). This list of ideological deceptions is not exhaustive but offers some examples of ideological deceptions.

As mentioned previously, in the pejorative use there is an element of deception involved, and the point of a critical ideology analysis is to uncover this deception. In this view, the main reasons to conduct ideology analysis are *normative reasons* (compare Jaeggi 2009, 69). As I interpret Geuss (see 1981, 75–76) and social and political philosopher Rahel Jaeggi’s article *Rethinking ideology* (2009, 69), the idea appears to be that a state of deception is considered itself as something bad, or the state of deception creates or stabilizes some morally wrong state of affairs. The point of a pejorative and critical ideology analysis is not only to analyze the situation at hand but moreover provide a route for emancipation from the grip of ideology (see Jaeggi 2009, 69). For example, not recognizing one’s true interests can be considered bad in the example of the worker if she is being exploited, and the world would be a morally better place if the worker did recognize the exploitation and started to advance her true interests.

If pejorative use of the concept of ideology defines ideology as something bad, what about good then? A *positive* definition of ideology supposes that ideology is something valuable and to be strived for (Geuss 1981, 23). For example, according to Geuss (1981, 23), V. I. Lenin considered the ideology of the proletariat to be something valuable in his work *What is to be Done?* where he argued that the proletariat ought to have the right ideology to promote their important interests and see through the delusions of bourgeoisie ideology. In my opinion, positive definitions of ideology are few and far between in the literature when compared to descriptive or pejorative accounts of ideology.

To recap, one can answer the question “is ideology good or bad?” by defining ideology

1. Descriptively (“I do not take a stance”), or
2. Pejoratively (“Ideology is bad and/or wrong”), or
3. Positively (“Ideology is good and/or right”)

2.3 Who is ideological?

Let us proceed to the third question, the “who” question: who is ideological? Social scientist Jonathan Leader Maynard suggests in his article *Ideological analysis* (2017, 5–6) that one can distinguish ideologies by defining them as group ideologies, that is “systems of ideas held in common by groups”, or as personal ideologies of individual people. An

example of an ideology held by individual could be a worker who holds a false belief that financiers only desire what is the best for the workers where in fact this may not be the case. When the scope of ideology analysis zooms in on this one worker, the analysis focuses mainly on an individual level. Similarly, when the scope is zoomed out to groups, the analysis focuses on group level.

I would argue that two additions can be made to Maynard's division. Firstly, one can unpack the macro-level group analysis into different kinds of components, such as institutions, organizations, and more informal groups (see for example Goldthorpe 1985, part 2 for an elaboration on different social institutions). Secondly, one can criticize the "who is ideological?" question in general by shifting the emphasis from the "who" in the question to the processes that create and maintain the agents who are ideological. For example, according to academic Terry Locke (2004, 1–2), a critical discourse analytic view holds that individual subjects are constituted by the social order and social processes, which are historically and socially constructed. In this view, individuals' ways of conceptualizing and constructing the world as well as their actions are effects of discourses⁵, and individuals are not the main force that maintain the social order (Locke 2004, 1–2). From this perspective, I would argue that the emphasis in this view is on the discourses that are ideological, not on the individuals who are ideological. It can be thus argued that according to this view, the basic unit of analysis of "who is ideological" is in fact discourse, and not individuals as such even though individuals might have some relevance as well.

To recap, one can answer the question "who is ideological?"

1. On the level of individuals, and/or
2. Groups (understood as informal groups, and/or institutions, and/or organizations), and/or
3. The basic unit that holds ideology is something else than groups or individuals, such as discourses

⁵ Locke, points out that "discourse" can be variously defined. For example, he takes up Norman Fairclough's Foucauldian definition that defines "discourse as a 'practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' ([Fairclough] 1992a: 64)" (Locke 2004, 5).

2.4 How and why do ideologies cause things?

Fourthly, I will focus on the “how and why” question. One can formulate the “how and why” question in different ways. I will argue that there are at least three relevant ways to formulate this question. One can understand the question causally, functionally, or genetically.

“How and why do ideologies cause things?” is the simplest main way to formulate the “how and why” question. This kind of “how and why” question is a question of *causal explanation*⁶. As Michael Freeden in the book *Ideology – A Very Short Introduction* (2003, 78–82) and social scientist Göran Therborn in his book *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980, 77–81) among others suggest, one can analyze ideologies based on what they cause in the world. Otherwise one would only speak of ideologies only as an abstract set of beliefs and thus overlook the real effects that ideologies cause in the world (Freeden 2003, 78–82). Looking from a causal perspective, ideologies are held by some agents in the world, and the study of ideology ought to analyze what is it that ideologies *do* in particular contexts or circumstances (see Maynard 2017, 8 & 16–17). The “how and why” question is therefore connected to the question of “what is ideology’s context?” These questions place ideology in the sphere of the social, not only *in abstracto*, but connected to the real-life processes of society.

One can ask the “how and why” question differently as well. The second way to rephrase the question is a causal question as well, but a more specified causal question (see Little 1991, 90): how and why do the ideologies *function*? Or as Raymond Geuss (1981, 15) puts it, ideological consciousness can be distinguished by its *functional properties*, that is “a form of consciousness is an ideology in virtue of the function or role it plays in *supporting, stabilizing, or legitimizing* certain kinds of social institutions or practices [my emphasis]”. Here the scope of analysis is again in the causal effects of ideologies. And as one can see when one follows Geuss’ definition⁷, not just any causes in this case are relevant, but only causes that “*support, stabilize, or legitimize* certain kinds of social institutions or practices.”

⁶ See Little (1991, chapter 2) for an elaboration on causal explanations.

⁷ Geuss focuses his functional analysis to “forms of consciousness” (Geuss 1981, 15). I am undecided if an analysis of ideology must necessarily be connected to forms consciousness. As I will clarify in this thesis, in Žižek’s opinion ideology is unconsciously structured but nevertheless causes effects on consciousness as well.

Analyzing these functional properties point us to the direction of *functional explanation*. Philosopher Daniel Little in his book *Varieties of Social Explanation – An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science* (1991, 94–95) argues that a functional explanation has the following structure:

1. “*Causal powers P persist in S* [for example, the capitalist class in capitalist society S has a causal power P to seek for profit]
2. *The causal power P has the disposition to produce R in the circumstances of S* [for example, the seek for profit P has the disposition to produce rich bourgeoisie R in the circumstances S of capitalist society⁸]
3. *Causal power P persists because it has the disposition to produce M* [for example, the seek for profit P persists because it has the disposition to produce bourgeoisie mass media M , which convinces the working class about the necessity of a capitalist system in this society]
4. *Causal power P ’s disposition to produce M causes the persistence of P in S .* [for example, capitalist class’ causal power P to seek for profit produces bourgeoisie mass media M , which influences the working people and thus causes the persistence of capitalist class’ causal power P to seek for profit in capitalist society S .]” (Little 1991, 94–95)

Furthermore, when talking about the functional properties of *ideologies* specifically, it seems that ideologies have this tendency of reproducing themselves as well. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall points out (1988, 46), there is an aspect in ideology of “what makes good sense”. I take this remark to mean that usually we can find ideologies reasonable and even persuasive. Ideologies can, for example excite us, provide us with security, and give us a sense of fairness (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005, 164). One can come up with other persuasive and reason-giving lists too, but the main point is that ideologies have to “stick” somehow, whether explicitly justified or reproduced in more implicit manners. Because ideologies justify themselves and “make good sense”, they are not always that easy to change.

The idea here is that ideologies can have a stabilizing and self-enhancing dimension; an ideology that persists is one that reproduces itself via different practices (see Geuss 1981, 15–16) and/or justifications (see for example Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). This point of view draws attention to the *processual* nature of ideologies, more specifically to the

⁸ At first sight, this second premise seems irrelevant for the functional chain. Little nevertheless wants to hold onto the second premise because “ P has certain causal powers – in particular, the dispositional property to produce certain outcomes”. (Little 1991, 95). I take this to mean that premises 1, 3 and 4 form a functional chain and the second premise maps out other, non-functional certain outcomes produced by this form of explanation.

manners in which ideologies are formed and reformed in social processes (see Therborn 1980, 77–81).

There are differences on how functional exactly ideologies are considered as being. For example, sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie and Bryan Turner in their 1978 article *The dominant ideology thesis* argued that sociology of knowledge focused too heavily on the idea that there is a dominant ideology that in capitalism (1) dominates all other ideologies, (2) that subordinated classes endorse, and (3) this dominant ideology “inhibits the development of radical dissent” because the subordinated classes endorse it (Abercrombie & Turner 1978, 149). This so-called *dominant ideology thesis* strikes as an example of a highly functional model of ideology because it supposes that in capitalism there is a dominating ideology that *always* functionally inhibits the development of alternative political views.

Nowadays, many argue against such highly functionalist analysis of ideologies. For example, Abercrombie and Turner themselves contend with sociologist Stephen Hill that this account of a dominant ideology overlooks different contents and effects of ideologies in different contexts. Abercrombie et. al. purport (2012, 164–165) that there is no functional necessity of domination exercised by any dominant ideology, but effects of ideologies are more multifold and indeterminate in different contexts. Moreover, for example political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe purport (2014, 182) that discourses are plural and are not a part of any clear-cut functional ideological system as the highly functionalist account might suppose. Thus, dominant ideologies are not determined, self-reproducing systems and to conceive them as such would miss the complexity of the world ideologies cause things in.

I will not endorse dominant ideology thesis either. I hold only that widely held ideologies have at least *some* elements, whether explicit or implicit, propositional or non-propositional that make individuals or groups “stick” to them. I argue that a robust functional analysis of ideology explains how the “sticking” ideologies are produced and reproduced. Furthermore, a robust analysis maps out elements that go against the grain of (more dominant) ideologies.

Little brings in two further criteria on functional explanation. When explaining functionally, one can always ask 1) what brought the circumstances about in the first place (in the capitalist example, how did capitalist class in capitalist society *S* come about) and 2) what social processes on the individual level of activity reproduce this set of norms over time

(for example, what produces the seek for profit *P* on an individual level in capitalist class in capitalist society *S*). According to Little, the point of these questions is to avoid the postulation of *any* self-coherent functional explanation because not everything that *can* be functional will in fact occur. (Little 1991, 100)⁹.

There is a third type of “how and why” question: what brought the ideology about in the first place? This question can be labelled as a question that asks for a *genetic explanation*¹⁰. Genetic explanation does not refer to biological genes in any way but to the origin or genesis of ideology. To put it in technical terms, the genetic explanation shifts the *explanans* and *explanandum*, the thing *X* doing the explaining and the thing *Y* to be explained (see Little 1991, 3–4 on *explanans* and *explanandum*). When asking a genetic question about ideology, ideology is not the thing doing the explaining, *explanans*, but the *explanandum*, the thing to be explained. More simply put: how did ideology *X* come about? What cause(s) *Y* made it come about? As argued previously by Little, providing a genetic account offers a more full-fledged picture when analyzing functional properties in general. Therefore, when analyzing how ideologies function, an explanation that includes a genetic explanation is a more robust explanation than the explanations that do not include a genetic explanation.

To summarize the “how and why do ideologies cause things?”, one has at least three relevant how and why questions:

1. How and why do ideologies come about? (genetic explanation)
2. How and why do ideologies cause things? (causal explanation)
3. How and why do ideologies function? (functional explanation)

2.5 What is ideology’s context?

I will add one more question category to the framework of ideology analysis. There is a difference if one analyzes ideologies only as an abstract, timeless set of beliefs or if one analyzes ideologies in specific societies or cultures in specific times (see Freeden 2003, 78–82). Therefore, I would add the question “what is ideology’s context?” The question of ideology’s context connects ideologies to different times and places. Moreover, when

⁹ Even though Little argues for a need of micro-explanation in social sciences, he does not purport that everything ought to be explained *solely* on the level of individuals. Rather, he advocates for both, a macro as well as a micro analysis (Little 1991, chapter “Methodological individualism”).

¹⁰ Geuss (1981, 19) employs similar language by defining ideology’s genetic properties as ideology’s origin or genesis.

analyzing ideologies in their context, a question that is closely related to the question of context is the question “does ideology change?”

For example, one can analyze capitalism as an abstract set of beliefs (“you as a capitalist hold these beliefs and have these arguments for those beliefs”) or alternatively analyze different causal properties (causal, functional, genetic) that ideologies and ideological beliefs have in different cultures in different times. It is one thing to do a philosophical analysis on a supposedly abstract capitalist set of beliefs and another thing to conduct an empirical analysis on what capitalism causes in 2020 Finland, for example. If one is analyzing what ideologies really cause in the world, one ought to place ideologies in time and place. Therefore, the question of context is relevant.

The answer to the question of context helps us to conceptualize the scope of ideology analysis regarding time and place. To provide a few preliminary distinctions, one can offer a *micro-level analysis* of ideologies. Micro-level analysis focuses on more specific times and more particular spatial phenomena, whereas *macro-level analysis* focuses on broader time spans and includes a broader spatial scale (Liljenström & Svedin 2005, 2–5). In other words, macro-level analysis can for example include more broadly different contexts and cultures than more particularly focused micro-analysis.

Lastly, I will add the question of change to the table of questions: do ideologies change? The question is important because if one considers ideologies in different contexts, the question is if and how ideologies themselves change as well. For example, one can question if capitalism as an ideology in Finland in 2020 refers to the same ideology as in the 19th century Great Britain. If it does, one can furthermore analyze similarities, differences, and historical changes of this ideology. Therefore, the question of change is relevant when analyzing if and how ideologies change over time and in different contexts.

The last two questions of ideology analysis are thus:

1. What is ideology’s context?
2. Do ideologies change?

2.6 The table of ideology analysis

In this section there is a summarizing framework of ideology analysis I have constructed so far. I will place Žižek's analysis of ideology within this table after introducing his theory in the next chapter. It is worth noting that many of the boxes in the chart do not exclude each other out but some of them do. For example, a concept of ideology cannot be both broad and narrow because if the concept refers to a myriad of different things, it is broad, and if it does not, it is narrow. Furthermore, a concept of ideology cannot be thought of as descriptive (neutral), pejorative (bad or wrong), and positive (good or right) in the same sense at the same time. It is necessary to pick a stand: either one does not make a judgment, makes a negative judgment, or makes a positive one.

The "how and why" row is an *explanatory*¹¹ row. One can divide explanations to 1) genetic explanations (how and why does ideology *X* come about), causal explanations (how and why does ideology *X* cause some *Y*) and functional explanations (how and what kind of social institutions or practices *Z* does ideology *X* support, stabilize, or legitimize).

I argued that a robust explanation on ideology provides a genetic explanation on how ideology *X* came about, how and what it causes, and because ideologies usually have a disposition to persist, typically a persisting ideology is one that has some self-stabilizing functional properties. Therefore, when explaining what ideologies *do* in the world, if the explanation ticks all the three explanatory boxes, it is a more robust explanation than the one that does not. I will introduce Žižek's theory of ideology in such a manner that it provides an answer to all three of these explanatory questions.

¹¹ See Little (1990, 3–4) for more information on what scientific explanations are.

The table of ideology analysis

<i>What?</i>	Discursive (ideas, beliefs, thoughts) and/or non-discursive (action, traits, habits, rituals, etc.)	Broad (for example, all culture) or narrow (for example, only political beliefs or beliefs central for human life)	The content of beliefs (for example, capitalist freedom as economic transactions in the private market sphere, or freedom as leisure time for Marx ¹²)
<i>Good or bad?</i>	Descriptive (no judgment on falseness or morality)	Pejorative (ideology is morally and/or epistemically wrong)	Positive (ideology is morally and/or epistemically good or right)
<i>Who?</i>	Individuals (what kind of individuals?)	Groups (can include formal institutions or non-formal groups)	No agents (for example, no emphasis on subjects: this position ought to define <i>what</i> holds ideology, if anyone or anything)
<i>How and why? (explanation)</i>	Genetic explanation How did ideologies come about (a Marxist example: bourgeoisie thought arises from bourgeoisie class interests, which are formed by the material base of society ¹³)	Causal explanation How do ideologies cause things? (a Marxist example: bourgeoisie ideology works by masking the real interests and exploitation of the proletariat ¹⁴)	Functional explanation How do ideologies support, stabilize, or legitimize <i>X</i> (usually themselves as well)? (For example, the ruling class has power over schools, medias etc., where bourgeoisie ideologies are internalized ¹⁵)
<i>Context?</i>	Context? Are ideologies historical, cultural, spatial? Micro and/or macro-level?	Change? Are ideologies static or transforming? How do they change?	

¹² Karl Marx argues in Capital 3 (1999, 593) that: “In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.”

¹³ The example is inspired by Marx. Marx in *The Critique of German Ideology* (2000) has an analysis of ideology that similarly starts from the material conditions of living men.

¹⁴ According to Rehmann (2013, 5), this is a common interpretation of Marx. Rehmann, however, has a more complicated analysis of Marx’ account in his book (see Rehmann 2013, chapter 2).

¹⁵ Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser draws attention (2012, 110–112 & 128–132) to different Ideological State Apparatuses such as school, where the ideology of the ruling class is being taught and internalized.

3. Žižek's theory of ideology

In this chapter, I will argue that according to Žižek, ideology means the illusion of the complete big Other, and this deceptive illusion takes place in subject's unconsciously structured fantasies. This sounds rather obscure for a reader who is not acquainted with his Lacanian theory. Therefore, I will have to unpack his Lacanian theory in order to understand Žižek's account.

I will begin this unpacking from Žižek's theory of language and connect it to his theory of unconscious. Secondly, I will lay out his theory of subject and map out how subject's desires are unconsciously structured. His theory of subjectivity answers to the question "who is ideological?" in his theory of ideology. As a part of the elaboration on Žižek's theory of subjectivity, I will provide a genetic explanation on how subjectivity and desire are born. This elaboration provides an answer to the genetic question of "how do ideologies come about?" in his theory of ideology.

Žižek's theory of desire is an important part of the explanation because deceiving ideological fantasies are formations of desire. Therefore, analyzing desire provides an explanation on what ideological fantasies are as well. After laying down his theory of language, unconscious, subjectivity, desire and fantasy, I can finally properly answer the question "what is Žižek's theory of ideology". Furthermore, I will answer to the question if ideology is good or bad in Žižek's theory. I will argue that because there is a deception that takes place in ideology, Žižek's analysis is a *pejorative account* of ideology; subjects who are under a spell of ideology are somehow deceived.

After laying out the groundwork of Žižek's theory and elaborating on what ideology means, I will answer the question "how and why do ideologies cause things" by mapping out effects that ideological fantasies have in Žižek's analysis. The causal ("what does ideology do?") and a functional ("what functions does ideology have?") questions are answered here. This is done in order to provide a more full-fledged account of Žižek's theory of ideology.

I will furthermore argue that in Žižek's theory, ideology has the same formal structure every context, that is every ideology in every context is in unconsciously structured fantasies that deceives subjects. Nevertheless, the contents of beliefs and subject positions in different ideologies vary in different historical contexts. Moreover, I will connect Žižek's analysis to place and time, answering the question "what is ideology's context?" by

arguing that Žižek's thinks that the most prevalent ideology in the contemporary West is neoliberalism. This claim will be elaborated on later. Lastly, I will answer the last question "does ideology change?" and purport that according Žižek's theory, ideological subject's unconsciously structured ideological fantasies have a strong tendency to "stick"; they are difficult to change. Change is nevertheless possible by doing what Žižek calls *traversing the fantasy*.

After this introductory work, all the questions of the framework of ideology have been answered. Finally, I will place Žižek's answers within the framework of ideology introduced in the first chapter and thus summarize his position.

3.1 Žižek's theory of language

In my opinion, it is the easiest to unpack Žižek's theory of ideology by beginning from his suppositions in theory of language. His linguistic analysis constitutes his theory of unconscious and thus functions as a background where subjectivity and desire can be placed on. From these elements, one can build his account of ideology. There is first, however, quite a lot of background theory work to be done before one can truly understand his theory. This background theory work is done here in the three first sections from 3.1 to 3.3.

Žižek's theory of language has a connection to structuralist ideas. Structuralists focus on the way that "phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations", and these phenomena "constitute a structure" (Blackburn 2016). Little condenses that (1991, 102–104) according to structuralism, there are abstract underlying structures and many social phenomena can be explained with these underlying structures. In Žižek's case, we are more interested in a branch of structuralism that purports that these abstract structures are linguistic, that is they "possess an abstract order akin to a syntax in language" (see Little 1991, 107). As we shall see in the case of Žižek, language has a structure and it shapes our perception and how we conceptualize the world. Žižek argues that we cannot acquire knowledge of reality behind the concept of language. Rather, we are always confined within the structure of language.

In Žižek's opinion, words and concepts do not refer to things or entities in reality (Žižek 1994, 39–45). Instead, in Žižek's account (1994, 39–45) language is considered as a system of differences, where if one tries to define a word, one finds other words that will fill

in the definition. It is as if looking up a word in a dictionary. For example, in Wikipedia the word “tree” is defined as “a perennial plant with an elongated stem, or trunk, supporting branches and leaves in most species”¹⁶. In Žižek’s terminology (compare 1992, 110), the characters “tree” are a *signifier*, which refers to the *signified* description “a perennial plant with an elongated stem [...]”.

According to Sharpe (2004, 68–69), Žižek has adopted this theory of language from psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who took it up from linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Simply put, signifiers mean words and signified are other words that fill in the description of what the words mean. One can then click on the word (i.e. signifier) “perennial plant” in Wikipedia, and one will find another description (signified) about perennial plants. One can further click the signifier “plant” and find another signified (description) about what a plant is, etc.

In Žižek’s view (compare 1989, 95–96), our way of conceptualizing the world works in a similar manner to browsing Wikipedia where we never actually see the trees directly but we always find more descriptions (signified “a perennial plant with an[...]”) that work as definitions of other concepts (the signifier “tree”). To stretch the example further, if one is browsing through Wikipedia, one will only find endless links after links that define concepts. One never accesses reality outside Wikipedia. Rather, we are always referring to another concepts within language. Language is conceived as a differential system where signifiers receive their meaning from referring to another signified (Žižek 1989, 109).

Furthermore, as is the case with Wikipedia, our language forms a structure as well. According to Žižek, language must form a *structure* because an endless chain of signifiers would lead to “a dispersed network of signifiers” (Žižek 2008a, 23). Žižek thinks that there must be something that stops the endless chain of ever-changing signifiers. Žižek does not in fact argue for this but one can interpret that because subjects appear to have quite habitual ways of conceptualizing the world and subjects appear to think that not everything is in a constant flow of change, there has to be something that stops this endless, structureless flow of signifiers (see Žižek 2008a, 23). The thing that creates the structure in the signifiers is called the *master signifier*¹⁷. Žižek argues that master signifier is

¹⁶ See Wikipedia tree <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree>

¹⁷ Žižek purports (2008a, 23) that “The only possible way out of this impasse is that[–] ascribe *one* signifier the function[–] for all the others [–] in this way, the proper Master-Signifier is produced”. Elsewhere, Žižek argues that Master signifier is necessary “since it stands for the meaning as such” (Žižek 2008a, xx).

the point that sutures the otherwise disconnected field of signifiers into a structured whole (Žižek 1989, 96 & 114–115). The master signifier is the signifier that the other signifiers point to for their meaning (Žižek 1989, 96–97).

I will elaborate on Žižek's thesis with an example. Let's imagine a right-wing libertarian person called Adam. Adam opines that individual's right to liberty and private property are the truest forms of freedom. He thinks that this freedom is best brought about by markets because they do not coerce individuals in a manner that would violate their rights, and they respect individual's right to property the most (see van der Vossen 2019 on libertarianism). Adam is against taxation because he thinks that it is unjustified coercion and violates his right to his own property.

In Adam's case, according to Žižekian analysis, "libertarianism" is his master signifier. This means that other signifiers gain their meaning by referring to the master signifier "libertarianism". For example, Adam might think that a truly "equal" (signifier of equality) society is a libertarian one, a truly "just" (signifier of justice) society is a libertarian one, and even a truly "feminist" (signifier of feminism) society is a libertarian one. All these signifiers, such as "freedom", "non-coercion", "equality", "justice" and "feminism", etc. refer to libertarianism; they gain their meaning through libertarianism (compare Žižek 1989, 96). In other words, libertarianism as a master signifier sutures these different signifiers together and makes Adam's world view seem as a coherent whole¹⁸.

If Žižek's analysis stopped here, he would be a structuralist because Adam's world view would form a coherent structure. But he is closer to a poststructuralist standpoint. According to sociologist Siniša Malešević (2002, 95), poststructuralist analysis emphasizes that there is no single theory or way of reasoning that could analyze the society objectively and in a totalizing manner. No theory is a closed off structure that can explain everything. In the spirit of post-structuralism, Žižek argues (for example 2008a, 43–46, 2008a, 171–172 & 1992, 102–103) that the master signifier is always incomplete, even though it sutures the field of meaning to seem like a coherent whole. According to Žižek, the master signifier *itself* is "empty" (Žižek 1989, 172–173)¹⁹.

This "incompleteness" and "emptiness" mean that as the referent of other signifiers, the master signifier does not refer to other signified for its meaning but is a referent of meaning for other signifiers (Žižek 1992, 102–103 1994, 44–45). Because it does not refer to

¹⁸ Another name for the master signifier is *point de capiton* (Žižek 1989, 95).

¹⁹ Žižek's theory has a more complicated relation to the so-called poststructuralists than introduced here (see Žižek's characterization and critiques poststructuralism 1989, 172–174).

any other signified, Žižek argues (2008a, 171–172) that it can only refer to itself. To continue the Wikipedia example, we could imagine a master signifier Wikipedia page where every other Wikipedia page eventually leads. In the case of Adam, the master signifier Wikipedia page would be the page with the headline “libertarianism” and this final Wikipedia page of libertarianism would be an empty page that has no descriptions or further links but only one link: a link back to itself. Žižek purports that we discover the master signifier to be a tautology “A is A”, or in this case “libertarianism is libertarianism” (compare Žižek 2008a, 171–172). Tautology is an *empty* sentence because it does not tell what libertarianism is, just like the empty Wikipedia page on libertarianism does not tell us what libertarianism is. There is a tautological “empty” signifier, a gap in the middle of linguistic structure in the master signifier. This is ironic because the master signifier was supposed to suture the structure of other signifiers together into a coherent whole. It is in the master signifier where we find the meaningless empty sentence and discover that Adam’s world view is thus arbitrarily sewn together by the tautological master signifier “A is A”, “libertarianism is libertarianism” (compare Žižek 1994, 152–153).

To put it more plainly with the example of Adam, master signifier “libertarianism” gives us no description or reason on why it connects all the other signifiers (liberty, equality, feminism, etc.) together. It does not give a reason why *true* liberty would be the libertarian form liberty or why the libertarian society would be a *truly* feminist society. In this sense, the master signifier of libertarianism is arbitrary. I take arbitrariness here to mean that there is no natural, universal, logical, or essential connection between all the signifiers that refer to it, but the master signifier is contingent (see Žižek on contingency 1993, 145–150 & 2008a, 129). In other words, there could be some other master signifiers with the same other signifiers (liberty, equality, feminism, etc.) that are built similarly; because of its contingency, the master signifier of libertarianism does not give us any reason why it would contain the *truest* form of all these other signifiers

Moreover, because there is no natural, universal, essential, or logical connection between different signifiers, signifiers might not be wholly compatible between one another (see Žižek 1989, 16–18). For example, signifiers of “liberty” and “freedom from coercion” might in fact not be as harmonious as naming them both under the master signifier “libertarianism” might seem. There might be elements in liberty that hinder the realization freedom from coercion, and vice versa. To provide an example of this, we can turn to Žižek’s description (1989, 16–18) when he tells us that Marx already pointed out that on the one hand in a capitalistic society everyone has a right to own the fruits of their labor,

but on the other hand the worker as a worker is forced to give the a part of fruits of her labor to the capitalist. By defining both signifiers “liberty” and “freedom from coercion” under the master signifier of libertarianism makes them *seem* coherent, whereas in fact they might not be that mutually compatible at all. In this case, the worker in fact has *no* right to (all) fruits of her labor because the capitalist takes a part of the commodities produced in order to gain profit and run his business²⁰. Therefore, liberty and freedom from coercion are (partly) incompatible in the master signifier of libertarianism.

If there are non-compatible parts and the master signifier is arbitrary, the structure of language is not a fully enclosed, harmonious structure but contains inconsistencies and non-fitting parts, “gaps”, within it. These non-fitting gaps are what Žižek calls (1989, 191–192) *the Real*. He thinks that the Real exists in these gaps and breaking points of the structure of language (Žižek 1989, 191–192). Despite the name, the Real has got nothing to do with *reality* because according to Žižek’s theory of language, one cannot gain acquire knowledge of reality. The Real exists merely in the gaps within the structure of language. According to Žižek (1989, 146), Lacan argues that the Real is “impossible”. I take this to mean that, by definition, the Real exists only in the non-fitting parts and inconsistencies of structure of language and is therefore not itself articulable in the structure of language.

Let’s consider our example again. Naturally, Adam might have definitions on what libertarianism is and when one asks him what libertarianism means, he can give a definition of libertarianism. Why then would Adam’s “Wikipedia page” of libertarianism be thus empty? If Adam can give a description (i.e. new signified) on libertarianism, why would his master signifier of libertarianism be truly empty? Does not Adam’s “Wikipedia page of libertarianism” contain some new signified if Adam has a description on libertarianism? Žižek, however, adds a twist to the story. The point of the master signifier is, that it *structures our unconscious*. The master signifier structures the field of meaning unconsciously, not consciously. Next, I will elaborate on Žižek’s theory of unconscious in order to understand his theory of ideology.

²⁰ Žižek here relies on Marx’s analysis of capitalism (see Žižek 1989, 16–18). Marx argues in Capital I that capitalists need the value produced by the worker because capitalists extract profit from it. The value produced by the worker that exceeds the costs of producing of commodities is called surplus value and is the basis of capitalist’s profit (Marx 1996, 106–108).

3.2 The master signifier is unconscious

Žižek claims that this structure of language, structured by the master signifier is in fact *unconscious* (Žižek 2008a, viii). There are a few misunderstandings regarding the concept of unconscious. Therefore, a clarification is in order.

Unconscious in Žižek's use (1989, 4–5) does *not* refer to any preconscious thought or idea that can be experienced consciously. The contents of unconscious do not “pop” into one's head, as some popularized versions of Freudian psychoanalysis might suppose. In the popularized versions of psychoanalytic therapy that we see in the popular culture, a patient might, for example “recall an unconscious memory” by doing free association on a couch during a psychoanalytic session. The recalled memory could be that “I truly want to have sex with my mother” or some other prototypical Freudian theme. According to Žižek (1989, 4–5), these kinds of recalled memories or thoughts that “pop” into one's head are in fact normal (pre)conscious thoughts. They are not unconscious in any sense, only ordinary (pre)conscious thoughts.

What then is unconscious? Žižek offers an analogy of a dream. In a dream, according to there are three different elements (Žižek 1989, 5–6):

- 1) Manifest dream-text (visuals of the dream; what you experience in a dream),
- 2) Latent dream-content (the normal (pre)conscious thoughts),
- 3) and thirdly, perhaps most importantly, the unconscious desire (which *forms* the dream)

Žižek argues (1989, 6) that the dreamer encounters the world (i.e. manifest dream-text) in the dream as already structured. Dreamers do not pop into empty dreams. Rather, dreamers are placed in the middle of dreams that are filled with different visuals, sensations, encounters, etc. We do not know why or how the dreams come about; the structuring of the dream is done by our unconscious desire²¹, in hiding from our consciousness. The realm of the *unconscious* is what constructs the dream. The dreamers can of course consciously wonder about “the meaning” of the dream, but Žižek purports (1989,5) that by reflecting on “the meaning of the dream”, one finds only normal, conscious thoughts (i.e. the latent dream-content), as in the popularized examples of psychoanalysis. The unconscious is what structures our dreams.

Žižek draws an analogy (1993, 63) that as in a dream, the structure of language constructs the way we apprehend and conceptualize the world as structured. In other words, it is

²¹ Desire will be analyzed later in this thesis.

because of our unconscious that the phenomenal world – the way the world appears to us – makes sense to us when we encounter it. We do not experience things only as a “bloom-ing, buzzing confusion”, as William James once phrased it (James 1918, 488), but rather we encounter things as already intelligible, and the world usually “makes sense” to us. This is because our unconscious has already structured the way we perceive the world as is the case unconscious has already structured the way we perceive the dream²².

The crucial point here regarding unconscious is that the *master signifier* does its work behind subject’s back, so to speak. That is, subjects do not reflectively decide on the way the world appears to them. Rather, the world as it appears to us is already dissected and conceptualized in language (Žižek 1993, 59 & 69). Thus, the master signifier structures our (phenomenal) world unconsciously. This is what I take Žižek to mean when he quotes Lacan’s famous dictum (Žižek 1989, 79) “unconscious is structured like a language”.

Additionally, Žižek argues (1989, 104–106) that subjects whose unconscious is structured by the master signifier presume that the master signifier “knows”. What I take Žižek to mean is that the subject might not *consciously* know anything about the master signifier, but because our perception and thinking is already unconsciously structured and concep-tualized by the master signifier, it guarantees the consistency of our beliefs about the world (compare Žižek 1989, 104–106)²³. Žižek in fact comes across as arguing that this is necessarily so because otherwise the world would not make sense to us.

To return to Adam, even though *consciously* he might be able to define libertarianism and provide coherent argumentation in favor of his views, the point is that because his *uncon-scious* is structured according to the unconscious master signifier of libertarianism, it structures his unconscious to seem as a coherent whole for him. It is in the unconscious where the master signifier functions by organizing his ways of conceptualizing the world, not in the realm of conscious thought. In Žižek’s opinion, there must be “an empty Wik-imedia page” (master signifier) where the other Wikipedia pages (signifiers) link (refer) to because this forms for subjects a seemingly coherent, constant structure to conceptual-ize the world unconsciously. He thinks (Žižek 1992, 76). that without the master signifier

²² I do not mean that structuring dream and structuring the world when awake are similar in every regard. I only suggest that according to Žižek, they are both structured by our unconscious. A dream works as an analogy in this thesis as an elaboration on the work of unconscious.

²³ Žižek argues (1989, 104–106) that naming creates a sense of necessity to subject that things truly are the way they are named, and it is master signifier that guarantees for subjects this supposed necessity that things are the way they appear to subjects.

the world would appear as a non-organized and constantly changing mess and thus would not make sense for subjects²⁴.

In the case of Adam, a Žižekian would argue that because his unconscious ways of conceptualizing the (phenomenal) world are structured according to the master signifier of libertarianism, he is disposed to see things from the perspective of libertarianism. For example, if he sees taxation, he is disposed to combine another signifier “theft” to it in order to describe what he sees as actually happening in taxation. This conscious thought of theft emerges from his unconscious structures of thinking and in a sense comes “naturally” to his conscious mind, without his conscious thinking. In this “naturalness” one can see the work of his unconscious master signifier that combined the signifiers taxation and theft according to the master signifier of libertarianism, spawning the conscious thought of theft when Adam sees taxation.

One remark is in order. The reader might have noticed that I have not yet introduced any of Žižek’s *arguments* in favor of his account. The reason is that the arguments are not that explicit in his texts. Moreover, he does not really give elaborate arguments that would compare his stance against other theories of language or unconscious, nor does he explicitly argue why his accounts would be the right or the best ones. Rather, as we will see in the critical chapter of this thesis, Žižek’s theory usually argues *within* the realm of his own theory. I will elaborate on this claim later.

Despite the seeming lack of explicit argumentation, there appears to be a kind of implicit argumentation in place. His theory of the master signifier and many other elements of his theory seems to rely on *transcendental argumentation*. According to Robert Stern, transcendental arguments are structured like this: *X* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *Y*. Given *Y*, it logically must follow that *X* must be the case too (Stern 2019). Therefore, Žižekian argument for the master signifier seems to be structured like this:

P1: Master signifier (*X*) is a necessary condition for the possibility of world making sense for subjects (*Y*).

P2: The world makes sense for subjects (*Y*)

Conclusion: Therefore, the master signifier (*X*) exists.

²⁴ In my opinion, Žižek does not take into consideration other kinds of structures besides his structure of the master signifier. For example, someone could advocate a kind of structuralist coherence theory and argue that elements in a language could circularly refer to another and thus form a coherent structure, leaving no need for an empty master signifier.

Why I argue that Žižek *seems* to rely on this kind of argumentation is that in his works I have read Žižek does not explicitly argue like this to prove his theories. This line of argumentation can be interpreted to be between the lines in his texts. For example, Žižek purports (1992, 119) that even though the master signifier is empty and contains paradoxes, it is nevertheless “transcendental”. These kinds of notions of transcendental scattered around Žižek’s works can be interpreted to point into the direction of transcendental argumentation, which I outlined here. Although Žižek is not explicit, it seems that the existence of a master signifier is derived by using this kind of transcendental argument.

Nevertheless, it is a matter of interpretation to construct Žižek’s argumentation in a logical and coherent manner. I will return to Žižek’s argumentation in the critical chapter of this thesis. In the next section, I will add Žižek’s theory of subjectivity and his theory of desire to the theoretical picture introduced here in order to provide an answer the questions “what is Žižek’s theory of ideology?” and “who is ideological?”

3.3 Genesis of subjectivity and desire

Thus far, I have established Žižek’s accounts on 1) how the structure of language, structured by the master signifier only refers within itself, and 2) this order of language structures our unconscious, and 3) this structure of language is incomplete; it contains gaps and inconsistencies (i.e. the Real).

In this section, I will introduce Žižek’s Lacanian theory of subjectivity as well as his theory of desire. These two components of his theory go hand in hand with one another and it is difficult to imagine one without the other. I will introduce them together against the background of his theory of language, which was elaborated previously.

First, I will expound upon the genesis of subjectivity because it is in my opinion the clearest way to understand Žižek’s account of subjectivity. This genetical account provides an explanation on how subjectivity and desires are born, thus answering the genetic question regarding Žižek’s theory of ideology. Moreover, this section provides an answer to the question “who is ideological?”. After elaborating on Žižek’s account of subjectivity, I can in the next subsection define desire and the illusion of unconscious fantasies and thus answer the question “What is ideology?”

I will begin with an example. To construct our example according to Žižek's Lacanian approach, let's imagine libertarian Adam as a toddler. Here I will lean all the way back to Lacan because he gives more concise theoretical background than what I have read from Žižek. Žižek embraces this part of Lacan's theory as well (see Žižek 1992, 75).

When to-be-libertarian Adam was a toddler, according to Lacan's theory he has "motor incapacity" and "disjointed limbs", which Adam does not yet manage to control (compare Lacan 2012, 94–96). At some point in his maturation, Adam will learn to recognize himself in the mirror (compare Lacan 2012, 94). This recognition in the mirror is what Lacan (2012) calls the mirror stage²⁵. From a Lacanian standpoint, Adam will learn to recognize his body as a coherent unity in the mirror by observing himself through the image of the mirror (compare Lacan 2012, 94–95).

The upshot of this mirror stage is that Adam needs another gaze, the image provided by the mirror, to bring an imagined structure (*Gestalt*) into his otherwise disjointed, non-organized movements. Because of the unified image in the mirror, Adam learns to *identify* himself as *one* single thing, a coherent subject (Lacan 2012, 97).

After this detour to Lacan, let's return to Žižek's texts. According to Žižek (1989, 20), the "mirror" does not have to be a real mirror. Therefore, the mirror in the mirror stage is more of a metaphor. According to this metaphor, if there was no Other gaze, no image in the "mirror" to bring structure, subjectivity as such would not exist (see Žižek 2008a, 197).

The Other's gaze does not only mean literally the gaze in the mirror but any internalized concept of identity, of "who I am" that is learned through the Other (Žižek 1989, 20). The gaze is connected to the way one conceives oneself. According to Žižek (1994, 145), the subject does not discover herself ever as a pure subjectivity ("I") but always as an object as well that exists under the gaze of the Other ("*that* is me")²⁶.

There seems to again be a transcendental argument in play here when Žižek argues that subjectivity is constituted by the gaze of the Other. In other words, the Other is necessary for subjectivity to exist in the first place. The birth and persistence of subjectivity as such

²⁵ In the translation I used, Lacan called this stage by the name of "mirror-phase" (Lacan 2012, 93). In French, the mirror stage is called *stade du miroir* (Buchanan 2010). Žižek calls this phase "mirror stage" (see for example Žižek 1989, 20). Because this work is about Žižek, I will call this stage "mirror stage" as well.

²⁶ There are, however, some complications. As I argue later in the thesis, the subject can never completely access the viewpoint of the Other (see for example Žižek 1994, 145).

depend on the Other. If there was no Other, there would not be subjectivity as we know it.

This Other is what Žižek calls *the big Other*. I will clarify the concept of the big Other with our example of Adam. Little Adam's caretakers might tell him that "good for pooping in the toilet rather than on the carpet!". This is how Adam's caretakers give him identities. In more technical jargon, Žižek purports (1989, 46) that the big Other bestows *symbolic mandates* upon subjects. These symbolic mandates give subjects names, such as "Good boy, Adam". As Sharpe points out (2004, 124) the structure of the big Other bears norms as well. I interpret this that the big Other points out what is to be valued (pooping in the toilet, cleanliness of the house), what is not (pooping on the carpet, a dirty house), what is wanted from the subject ("poop in the toilet!"), and how subject's identity (i.e. symbolic mandates) is defined in the structure of the big Other ("*good boy*, Adam!")²⁷

The big Other is defined as the whole structure of language (Žižek 1989, 146). The big Other "dominates and regulates our lives" (Žižek 1992, 53). It carries normative expectations, values, and subject positions. Master signifier is a part of the big Other, which sutures the structure of language to seem as a coherent whole for the subject (Žižek 1989, 105). From now on, I will refer to the big Other when referring to the structure of language in general²⁸.

Žižek's Lacanian theory of the mirror stage certainly has some intuitive plausibility. Phenomenally speaking, subjects to an extent do conceive themselves as objects under the gazes of others. For example, in social situations people think about how they might be seen in the eyes of others. In social situations subjects have *internalized standards* on how to act properly and how the others might view them if they act inappropriately. These internalized criteria, these so-called internalized gazes of the others, structure what we consider as "proper behavior" and how we know how to act appropriately.

Lacan and Žižek radicalize this idea of "internalized gaze" by purporting that in fact one cannot escape internalized gaze of the evaluating and norm-giving big Other, the inner gaze that observes us and structures the way we think about ourselves (Žižek 1989, 117–118). What is important here is that the big Other is not a gaze of any other real person.

²⁷ There are some complex differences between the gaze in the mirror and the symbolic mandates bestowed upon the subject by the big Other, but these differences are not relevant for this thesis (on some of the differences, see Žižek 2008a, 10–13). The unified picture of the subject in the mirror is called *the imaginary* (Myers 2003, 21).

²⁸ *Symbolic structure* is another name for the big Other (Žižek 1989, 116). I will stick with the concept of big Other for the sake of simplicity.

Rather, the big Other means internalized rules, identities, and values learned and internalized from the culture.

Žižek follows Lacan and claims that when "living body" enters the structure of language, the big Other twists and transforms it irrevocably (Žižek 1989, 191). Žižek argues (1989, 138 & 2001, 55) that because of the big Other, subjects cannot return to any natural biological, instinctual state, which there might have been before. Instead, our desire and enjoyments as subjects are transformed and mediated by the big Other. Desire is thus not something naturally or biologically given. Rather, it is learned by the structure of the big Other (Žižek 1989, 132 & Wood 2012, 80).

Some enjoyments are shut out from the subject's sense of self in the mirror stage (Žižek 1989, 191). These forbidden enjoyments become thus the Real²⁹. In the example of Adam, pooping on the carpet becomes forbidden and "not something Adam would do". This forbidden enjoyment of Adam to poop on the carpet becomes something that should not exist, something unsymbolizable in the sense that the subject cannot incorporate it into his or her sense of self. Matthew Sharpe (2004, 7) argues that the Real usually refers to forbidden matters, such as violence, sex, and death. I take this to mean that because these matters are usually taboo in societies, they become the Real, something not accepted and not spoken of publicly.

Adam sees himself only as an object in the eyes of the big Other (via internalized gaze and concepts of his parents in his case), but he will never be able to access the position of the "gaze of the big Other"³⁰ (compare Žižek 1989, 116–117). In other words, internally Adam sees himself as an object, but he does not know why these identities are bestowed upon him. Adam does not know *why* the big Other give him the identities and expectations that it gives him (compare Žižek 1993, 71). He will never access the viewpoint of the big Other that nevertheless constitutes his own subjectivity.

As argued previously, in Žižek opinion we unconsciously believe things but do not know *why* we believe them. This is likewise with desire; we desire things, but we do not know *why* we desire them (see Žižek 1993, 31). Our way of conceptualizing and viewing the world is structured by the big Other, and the way we desire is unconsciously structured

²⁹ These forbidden enjoyments have a term, *jouissance*. Jouissance is unsymbolizable, excessive, transgressive enjoyment of the subject's body in the Real (Žižek 1989, 191 & Sharpe 2004, 64). It is transgressive because it is forbidden by the symbolic (see Žižek 2001, 72–73).

³⁰ Žižek thinks (1989, 117–118) that because we only encounter ourselves as objects, it is important to analyze subjectivity by asking "for whom is the subject enacting this [identification] role? Which gaze is considered when the subject identifies himself with a certain image? [his emphasis]".

as well. This is precisely because of the aforementioned reasons: the big Other gives subject symbolic mandates that tell who the subject is and *what* to desire, but because the subject can never access the viewpoint of the big Other, she never exactly know *why* she desires what she desires.

A short summary is in order. Firstly, the big Other structures the way subjects conceptualize the (phenomenal) world unconsciously; the world appears to the subject as it is unconsciously structured by the big Other, the structure of language, sewn together by the master signifier. There is a similar structure regarding desire as well: subjects desire as they are unconsciously structured by the big Other.

For example, when Adam takes on the identity of a good libertarian boy, he learns to desire things that a libertarian good boy ought to desire. Such things may include, for example, cutting the social care of the poor because he thinks that taxation is theft. He supposes that there is value in desiring the things he desires. This is because he unconsciously already believes in the big Other, and when the big Other gives him symbolic mandates ("Good libertarian boy!"), he will believe that this is who he is ("I am a good libertarian boy!") and these things are valuable and worth striving for ("I should be a good libertarian boy!"). Of course, in real life identities are more complex than in this example³¹.

One more thing is crucial. When we think of identities given by the big Other, we are not always dealing with rational, organized systems of ideas as could be the case with political ideologies. Political ideologies can try to rationalize their world views in different manners, for example by providing specific key objectives and giving reasons to believe in these key objectives (Maynard 2017, 16–17). For example, Adam as a libertarian adult might have rationalized his world view by trying to provide rational arguments in favor of his world view.

However, for Adam's identification as a "libertarian good boy", the intellectual doctrines of libertarianism are not the most crucial aspect. More important is the imaginary realm, that is the realm where subject sees herself as a complete object in the internalized gaze of the big Other (Žižek 1994, 179 & Wood 2012, 178). The big Other does not give

³¹ Žižek's Lacanian analysis is not necessarily connected to childhood because the big Other and what is the forbidden Real might change during subject's lifetime. As an example of this, see Žižek's elaboration on Freud's patient Wolfman (Žižek 1994, 31).

identities³² to subjects firstly and foremostly by offering rationalizations and argumentation but rather by imaginary Mirror stage: by offering a viewpoint from which the subject gazes herself as valuable and by giving normatively charged vivid images that show what is valuable and desirable, teaching the subject to desire.

For example, we can imagine that Adam has learned his parents' adoration of expensive clothes and luxurious goods. Unconsciously speaking, they represent (i.e. signify) the meaning of success to him. And if Adam in his adulthood earns some money and buys fancy, businessman-like expensive suits, he does not do it because of any inherent quality in the clothes themselves but because they are a token of success for him. Being successful is a desire that he wants to fulfill, and this desire is structured by his big Other of libertarianism. Thus, libertarianism is not only an abstract theoretical set of intellectual beliefs but is structurally connected to a myriad of other meanings, for example to reverence of expensive, businessman-like clothing that carry the meaning (i.e. they signify) of success. These meanings and desires are learned when subjects learn to desire within the structure of the big Other (see Žižek 1989, 106).

I have elaborated on Žižek's theory of language, unconscious and given a genetic explanation how subjectivity and unconsciously structured desires are born. I can now answer the question "who is ideological?" In Žižek's theory, the basic ideological unit is the subject who internalizes the identities, beliefs, and desires of the culture and structures her unconscious accordingly. This internalized, unconscious structure is called the big Other. However, conscious individuals with their desires and actions are more effects of the big Other rather than being the foremost social agents making any kind of "autonomous" choices. In this sense, the unconscious big Other of the individual is the thing that is ideological.

3.4 What is ideology in Žižek's theory?

After doing the background work on Žižek's theory, in this section I will elaborate on what ideology means in his theory. Moreover, I will answer if ideology is good or bad in his theory. I will argue that Žižek's theory employs the concept of ideology pejoratively because subjects who are ideological are deceived.

³² Žižek applies Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation. According to Žižek (1989, 42–43), interpellation is the process where the to-be-subject recognizes herself as being addressed by some symbolic mandate (i.e. identity) and identifies herself as the carrier of this symbolic mandate.

What is then ideology, according to Žižek? What parts of his theory does the concept of ideology refer to? Žižek argues that

“[–]in its basic dimension it [ideology] is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself [–] The function of ideology is [–] to offer us the social reality as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.” (Žižek 1989, 45)

Here Žižek is speaking of the Real in the big Other that fantasy conceals. Ideology is the concealment of the incompleteness of the big Other, concealment conducted by fantasy (see also Žižek 1992, 246). Žižek means the big Other in this quote when he speaks about “our ‘reality’”, and “the social reality”. As pointed out previously, there is no access to reality itself according to Žižek’s theory; rather, Žižek is here talking about the phenomenal reality constructed by the big Other. These notions of “impossibility” and “traumatic, real kernel” refer to the Real in the big Other. Therefore, ideology in Žižek’s theory is the concealment of the incompleteness of the big Other, concealment done by fantasy. I will next elaborate on the concept of fantasy in Žižek’s theory to clarify what this means.

To begin, let us recall again that the master signifier is incomplete. If the big Other is incomplete and thus contains gaps (the Real) within it, how can it bring about a coherent structure to the subject? How can Adam unconsciously hold that his libertarianism is right even though libertarianism as a master signifier is incomplete? This is where *fantasy* steps into the forefront. Žižek argues (1989, 80) that fantasy *conceals* the incompleteness of the big Other. The main idea behind this claim is that the big Other structures the way Adam conceptualizes the world as well as his desires, and therefore Adam always-already unconsciously holds that the desires make sense. Adam does not know why the big Other desires these things and will not ever know because he cannot access the viewpoint of the big Other, but he nevertheless has grown to structure his beliefs and desires according to the structure of the big Other.

Žižek argues (1992, 246) that “the big Other is in itself inconsistent” and fantasy is “an attempt to fill out this lack of the Other [–] (i.e. to (re)constitute the consistency of the big Other)”. I will provide an example to clarify this idea. Žižek (1994, 89–96) mentions that in courtly love, a lady is an unreachable object of knight’s desire. In other words, a lady is what the knight fantasizes about. I will build upon this example introduced by Žižek. Imagine a knight who does heroic deeds in order to be together with a lady. If the knight were to finally have a chance to be together with the lady, he would soon enough

notice that the lady is a normal, ordinary person among others, no more or no less. But for the desiring knight before he gets to know the lady, the lady appears as a salvation who could finally fulfill his desires and give him the completeness that he has always strived for (compare Žižek 1993, 122 & Wood 2012, 22).

Let's imagine ourselves asking the knight "why do you desire this lady?" The knight might answer by uttering vivid, poetic visual images about "the beautiful way her hair flowed in the wind" etc. Now, the crucial point is that these vivid, desire-inducing poetic qualities here are not properties of the flesh-and-blood empirical woman. Crudely put, not everyone can agree with the assessment "the way her hair flowed in the wind was the most beautifully exquisite thing I have ever seen". Rather, the adoring poeticism springs *from knight's own structure of desire structured by the big Other*. Unconsciously the knight fits the flesh-and-blood woman into his fantasy frame of the Lady (compare Žižek 1989, 132 & 1993, 47). It is knight's structure of desire and fantasies that Žižek points to when analyzing knight's desire, not any property of the flesh-and-blood woman herself.

In other words, the knight has been brought up believing that it is valuable and desirable for a knight to be together with a lady. These internalized expectations and desires are the big Other structuring knight's desires. They constitute his vivid, poetic fantasy of the Lady³³. Beyond these vivid, poetic images, the knight cannot give a proper reason why this thing, why this woman, and not any other thing is the one thing that would complete him as a knight-subject, that would make his desire finally fulfilled. Fantasy is what these vivid, imaginary visuals of completeness³⁴ with the Lady are. They teach the knight how to desire some things as objects of desire (Žižek 1989, 132). In this case, the knight has been taught by the big Other to desire a Lady. This flesh-and-blood woman fits into his fantasy frame, into his unconscious structure of desire that lures him into thinking that she is the Lady of his dreams who could complete him.

Now, the critical part of Lacan and Žižek is that there is *nothing* beyond these vivid, poetic, adoring visual images of the Lady. Beyond the fantasy images there is *nothing* that would make the knight complete. If he became acquainted with the lady, sooner or later he would notice that he is no more a completed person. Despite the knight pursuing

³³ Fantasy is always an answer to the question of "Che vuoi?", that is what does the big Other want from the subject when naming the subject as something; what is the reason why the big Other named the subject the way it did (Žižek 1989, 126–132).

³⁴ Žižek argues that fantasy is always a fantasy of wholeness, of there being no inconsistency (see Žižek 1992, 104). The inconsistency refers to Žižek's idea that the subject is always a subject of lack because it only exists within the inconsistent big Other and can never be completely a part of the big Other because the big Other itself is incomplete (see for example Žižek 1989, 73 & 1992, 58–62)

the completeness so eagerly, he does not know what this completeness is, and neither does he know what he is exactly searching for in the Lady. This is the function of the fantasy. The knight does not know what it is that he is looking for. He just supposes, or rather the big Other in him supposes that there is a secret, something to be achieved that makes the object worthy of his desire (compare Žižek 1989, 44). *Fantasy conceals the fact that there is no secret*; there is nothing in the woman that would make the knight complete. This is where *ideology* enters Žižek's theory; ideological fantasy conceals the fact that there is *nothing*. As quoted above, fantasy is "an attempt to fill out this lack [i.e. inconsistency] of the Other" (Žižek 1992, 246). It is the vivid images that lure us into thinking that there is something in the object of our desire that would make us complete (Žižek 1993, 122), even though there is in fact *nothing*³⁵. The deceiving, ideological illusion here is in the lure that there is something that would complete the subject, even though there is nothing in the real flesh-and-blood object itself.

The example of the knight and a Lady might appear as a sexist one, but I understand this example as a critical point. In my opinion, here Žižek points out that in Western cultures, subject positions of males and females are constructed in such a manner that woman is usually posited as the object of man's desire. Žižek's analysis of ideology focuses on the construction of desire. By pointing out the arbitrariness of the big Other constructing the fantasy and deception in fantasy, his analysis denaturalizes and critiques formations of desire. Žižekian analysis in this case points out that the desired, male-completing Woman, does not exist. There are only flesh-and-blood women, no Woman that could complete the male desire³⁶.

Is ideology then good or bad, according to Žižek? Because ideology contains a deception in fantasy, Žižek's theory is a pejorative theory of ideology; someone who is ideological is deceived and gets something wrong. Ideological subject supposes that there is a fulfillment in the fantasized object of desire, whereas in fact there is none. Therefore, Žižek's theory is a pejorative theory on ideology.

³⁵ This is what is called *objet petit a*. *Objet petit a* is the emptiness behind the fantasy as well as the fantasy that conceals this emptiness (Žižek 1994, 178). According to Sharpe, *objet petit a* is the supposition that there is "a secret", a reason why the big Other desires what it desires (Sharpe 2004, 149).

³⁶ For more information on Woman as the object of desire, see Žižek's chapter "Otto Weininger, or, 'Woman doesn't exist'" (Žižek 1994, chapter 6).

3.5 What does ideology cause in Žižek's theory?

I can now answer to the question “how and why do ideologies cause things” by analyzing different effects and functions that Žižek's theory of ideology includes. As argued previously, ideology, by definition, *conceals* the incompleteness of the big Other. This is the basic effect of ideology: it blinds subjects from the fact their objects of their desire cannot complete them.

Žižek purports that if subjects finally noticed that fantasized objects of desire are only normal objects among others, it would be traumatic for the subjects (see Žižek 1989, 134 & Wood 2012, 57). Consequently, Žižek asserts (1989, 134) that getting too close to one's fantasies can be traumatic. For example, the knight in the example might have built his whole identity and desires around the goal of being together with a Lady. According to Žižekian analysis, if he finally got to be together with the lady, he would notice that the lady cannot complete him. This can be in fact a horrible experience for him. Knight's sense of reality (i.e. the big Other) and his identity (symbolic mandates) might completely disintegrate; there was in fact *nothing* in the woman that could complete his adoring desire (compare Žižek 1992, 51). In Žižek's Lacanian language, he encounters the horrid, disavowed Real within the big Other (see Žižek 2008b, 6). Encountering the Real discloses the fact that the big Other is arbitrary, that there is no reason why the Other is structured the way it is structured. He will realize that this big Other and its desires are not any better than any other big Others and other desires. This encounter with the Real and realization of arbitrariness of his big Other might force him to abandon his way of viewing the world, his big Other, along with his old identities.

Therefore, approaching and encountering the Real behind the deceptive veil of fantasy is horrible for subjects (see Žižek 2008a, xii). The subject's world does not make sense anymore. Encountering the Real shatters ideological illusions and might disintegrate subject's big Other, shattering subject's identity within it as well. Therefore, maintaining a distance to fulfilling one's fantasies is in fact *necessary* in order to maintain subject's “sense of the world”, the subject's big Other.

I will employ the concept of fantasy with Adam to clarify ideological fantasy's crucial functions, this time with a more political example. This helps us to map functional properties of ideology in Žižek's theory as well as uncover some political implications of his theory.

Adam might desire to build a libertarian society and thus he becomes a politician. His desire revolves around building a perfect libertarian society. Let's imagine a scenario where Adam becomes a famous politician in the libertarian party. He works tirelessly in the party in order to fulfill his fantasy of the perfect libertarian society. He ascends through the ranks and becomes the chairperson of the party, and eventually he even manages to become the new prime minister. Now, what would be the Žižekian analysis of this example?

In Žižekian analysis of ideology, Adam really does not know *why* he desires the libertarian society. He cannot put his finger on why it just seems to make sense for him, speaking on the level of desire. He of course might have his own rationalizations and arguments to support his views, but those are not the main driving force in his life as a libertarian politician. Rather, the main driving force are unconsciously structured fantasies. He has vivid fantasy images of a libertarian society and he does not know where these images come from. The vivid images are conscious, but the structure of desire that produces them is unconscious.

Let's imagine that when Adam is a prime minister, an economic downturn occurs. Adam maintains that this economic downturn took place not because of libertarian political ideology itself, but because of some other contingent, external conditions to his libertarianism. For example, if someone argued that the economic downturn took place because libertarian, non-state-intervention markets leads to economic crises due to speculations and bubbles in the market³⁷, Adam would contend that the downturn happened only because of something *external* to the libertarian ideology. For example, he might think that state-owned public institutions prevented the markets from functioning optimally. Moreover, Adam could for example blame the social democratic party for supporting the public sector excessively, which in his opinion distorted the "natural functioning of the market", leading to an economic downturn.

The upshot is that because Adam's unconscious beliefs and desires are structured according to libertarianism, he is disposed to find a reason about the failings of the economy in anything else but the libertarian big Other itself. By externalizing the blame, Adam can therefore hold onto the idea that if only there had been more market, not less, there would have been no economic downturn³⁸.

³⁷ See for example Patomäki's (2013) similar explanation on the 2008 financial crisis.

³⁸ For example, Miron (2009) argues from a libertarian perspective that government intervention to bailout the banks in fact worsened the 2008 financial crisis.

The crucial point from a Žižekian perspective is that ideologies always must *externalize* the Real, the things that do not fit within the structure of the big Other; these externalizations provide a reason why the fantasy's fulfillment did not come about (Žižek 2008a, 264). For example, the knight can hold onto his ideology of the perfect Lady only so long as there are always some contingent impediments that stop him from being together with the flesh-and-blood woman. There always must be some impediment to block the full realization of fantasy, such as evermore chivalrous duties to be completed. This is because if the knight approaches his fantasy too close, he will encounter the Real and notice that the lady is not the Woman who could complete him.

Likewise, Adam can only maintain his fantasy of the perfect libertarian society only so long as he does not get too close to the fact that *there is nothing behind his libertarian fantasy*: no perfect society, no fulfillment, probably not even perfectly working markets³⁹. Adam can only hold on the supposition that his ideology of libertarianism is non-arbitrary and coherent only so long as he does not approach his ideological fantasy too closely. The fantasy is Real; it is horrendous to notice that the object of fantasy does not provide the fulfillment desired for.

Therefore, Adam always must come up with new excuses, seemingly contingent facts that bar his access to the fulfillment of his fantasy. Only then can he maintain the illusion that his fantasy would complete him as well as the society. To put the point in more technical, psychoanalytic language: symptoms, the contingent facts that stop the subject from fulfilling her fantasy, are in fact not contingent, but functionally necessary for the subject to maintain her belief in the big Other (see Žižek 1989, 243 & 2008a, 89). As Žižek argues:

"This is the paradox of the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom: symptom is an element clinging on like a kind of parasite and 'spoiling the game', but if we annihilate it things get even worse: we lose all we had – even the rest which was threatened but not yet destroyed by the symptom." (Žižek 1989, 85)

In the quote, Žižek is arguing that subjects always must hold onto the obstacles that stop them from fulfilling their desires (called "symptoms"). This is because if there were not these obstacles in the way of fulfilling our desires, then subjects would encounter the horrid fact that there is no completeness when the desires are fulfilled; the big Other had no reason to desire what it desires but was an arbitrary construct. Realizing this would

³⁹ Hill & Myatt (2010) comprehensively criticize the hypothesis of perfectly working markets.

mean facing the meaningless, anxiety-causing Real (Žižek 2008a, xii). Adam always has to externalize the blame on anything else but the big Other, and he might for example in the last instance rather blame himself of the failings of libertarian big Other ("I did not pursue libertarian ideology rigorously enough as a prime minister, the blame of the economic downturn is on me!")⁴⁰ rather than disclosing that the libertarian big Other is arbitrary and incoherent, and in fact may have well been the real reason for economic downturn (compare Žižek 1991, 29–30) .

To recap this rather complex section: by placing an emphasis on subject's formation of desires in the structure of the big Other, Žižek analyzes the way subject's desires and fantasies are constructed and how they in fact sustain subject's belief in the big Other. The answer to the question "what is ideology?", according to Žižek is that ideology is unconsciously structured fantasies that conceal the fact that the big Other is arbitrary and incoherent. A Žižekian theory of ideology analyzes the unconscious structures according to which subjects learn to desire and fantasize. Furthermore, Žižek's analysis contends that subjects do not know why they fantasize of the things they fantasize about. This is because subject's structure of desire is unconscious. The big Other is always incomplete and arbitrary, and therefore there is nothing in the object of desire that would make subjects complete. If subjects fulfill their fantasies, there is no completion, but rather they encounter the horrendous Real of arbitrary and incoherent big Other.

Furthermore, to answer the question of "what functional properties are there in Žižek's theory of ideology?", the main effect of the fantasy is the concealment of the fact that there is nothing in the object of fantasy that would complete the subject. Fantasy thus has the functional property of maintaining subject's belief in the big Other. This function can only be upheld if subject maintains a distance to realization of her fantasy. This distancing is done by setting up new obstacles to the realization of fantasy.

Functionally, there must be obstacles for subjects in the way of realizing their fantasies. Because the subjects believe in the completeness of the big Other, they will consider these obstacles as contingent, external obstacles with regards to the big Other. This is a mistake on subject's part because the obstacles in Žižek's analysis are not contingent but in fact functionally *necessary*. They are necessary because they maintain subject's distance to

⁴⁰There are some complex details on how subjects can maintain a distance to realization of their fantasies. One of the main ways is that subjects do transgressive, forbidden things in order to keep the realization of big Other's fantasies at bay (see Žižek 1992, 45 & 1994, 55 as well as Wood 2012, 30 for more information).

the horrendous Real of realizing her fantasy and thus help the subject to maintain her “sense of reality”, her big Other.

Therefore, the subject must maintain a distance to the big Other’s fantasies on the one hand, but the big Other teaches the subject how to desire and fantasize on the other. For example, Adam is torn between being a good libertarian on the one hand (fantasy structured by the big Other), and not getting too close to realization of the fantasy on the other. In this push-and-pull motion of approaching fantasies and maintaining a distance to them, subjects can occupy different positions and by extension different ways to structure their desire⁴¹.

Is *every* fantasy an ideological fantasy? I have not read a passage where Žižek would specify between ideological and non-ideological fantasies. Therefore, I agree here with psychoanalytically bent political theorist Jason Glynos when he argues in his article *The grip of ideology: A Lacanian approach to the theory of ideology* (2001, 204) that Lacanian theory of ideology is “a strictly formal theory of ideology”, where formality means “the construction of contentless structure”, which can be utilized in different concrete analysis. This position in my opinion entails that the contents of ideological fantasies can be anything; Žižek’s focus in analysis of ideology is in the concealment of the Real in the big Other that fantasies do. Every fantasy is therefore an ideological fantasy. Despite Žižek’s theory of ideology being formal in structure, there are some ideologies that are more *prevalent* than others in different contexts. In the next subsection, I will elaborate on Žižek’s account of neoliberalism, the most prevalent ideology in the contemporary West.

3.6. Context of ideology: Neoliberalism

In this section, I will place Žižek’s theory in contemporary context. I will provide a short summary on what Žižek considers the contemporary West’s most prevalent ideology, which he calls by many names⁴², but which can be called neoliberalism (see Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 179). This contextualizing provides Žižek’s analysis of contemporary culture as well as an example how Žižek’s analysis can be utilized on a societal level. I will rely considerably on Matthew Sharpe’s & Geoff Boucher’s book *Žižek and Politics – a*

⁴¹ See Wood’s (2012, 132) summary on different subject positions.

⁴² Sharpe & Boucher employ the names like neoliberalism, capitalism, neoliberal capitalism and liberalism (see Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 73, 88 & 109).

Critical Introduction (2010) because it summarizes Žižek's political thought across his bibliography rather well.

What are the signifiers of neoliberalism? According to Sharpe & Boucher (2010, 179), the ruling ideology of contemporary society in Žižek's opinion is neoliberalism. The master signifier "neoliberalism" determines other signifiers accordingly. For example, "freedom" means "the right to invest money freely" and "equality" means the "formal equality of all to trade and own property, protected by the rule of law" (Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 73).

Sharpe & Boucher argue (2010, 89, 130 & 150) that Žižek considers contemporary subjects to accept global capitalism as the only game in town; neoliberal economics delineate what is considered "realistic", and any opposition to capitalism is considered a possible route to totalitarianism. In Sharpe & Boucher's analysis (2010, 169), Žižek points out that neoliberalism conceptualizes political decisions to be made by technocratic specialists who supposedly rationally deliberate between different viewpoints until they reach a "non-ideological" consensus, where usually market logic expands evermore to each sphere of life. Politics is thus diminished more and more to technocratic and market-driven thinking, which are considered as "rational" and "objective", whereas in fact they are neither. According to Sharpe & Boucher (2010, 109–110 & 32–34), Žižek moreover criticizes the Left for accepting capitalism as the only economic system possible and focusing merely on identity politics, which tackle issues of gender, race, and sexuality but do not analyze capitalistic exploitation or class.

What is the Real of neoliberal capitalism? If the signifiers mentioned above are the signifiers of neoliberal capitalism that constitute the structure of the neoliberal big Other, what is the Real then? In Žižek's view (Žižek 2009, 11), capitalism is the Real itself. He argues (Žižek 2009, 11) that "capital determines what goes on in social reality". Sharpe & Boucher interpret that this determination happens 'behind the backs' of agents", and the "senseless and traumatic" functioning of capitalism is not experienced consciously (Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 133–143).

What could this mean? I interpret Žižek that capitalism itself produces horrendous outcomes that nevertheless are a part of normal functioning of capitalism. These horrendous traumatic outcomes are, as Sharpe & Boucher (2010, 178) point out, for example ecological disaster and new Third World underclasses who bear the burdens for producing riches

for the wealthy West⁴³. Žižek comments (2009, 10–13) that there is systemic violence in place: violence conducted by normal functioning of capitalism when the logic of capitalism determines daily realities of people's lives in a coercive manner. I interpret that the normal functioning of capitalism creates horrible, traumatic Real that is incoherent with the signifiers of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberal capitalism creates ecological disasters, which are incoherent with the neoliberal supposition "optimal rationalization done by the market". Moreover, neoliberal capitalism creates poor, exploited underclasses, which is incoherent with the neoliberal supposition that everyone has "the right for one's fruits of labor".

A more mundane everyday example of capitalism "determining our social reality" is a situation where a factory is moved abroad due to global competition, leaving thousands of workers unemployed. These workers have no say or control with regards to their livelihoods because the abstract logic of capitalist competition determines their lives instead of them⁴⁴. In my interpretation, this lack of control points that in the heart of capitalism there is the Real of the worker. As argued previously in this thesis, the worker is at the same time a person who is entitled to fruits of his labor (according to capitalistic freedom) but is one commodity among others who produces these fruits of labor for someone else and has no say in the process of production (see Žižek 1989, 16–18). The laborer is at the same time a person of rights on the one hand, and a commodity with no rights on the other. Capitalism is thus, according to Žižek's Marxist standpoint here, incoherent (i.e. it contains the Real).

What are the ideological fantasies of neoliberal capitalism? If these are some of the Real of capitalism, what are the ideological fantasies of neoliberal capitalism? Ideological fantasies again pose these problems inherent to neoliberal capitalism's own normal functioning as something *external* to it. For example, when there are poor and exploited underclasses in the Third World countries and this poverty is one cause in the rise of illiberal religious fundamentalism, the neoliberal capitalist perspective sees religious fundamentalism as something that exists not because of neoliberal capitalism, but rather as something *external* to neoliberal capitalism (see Žižek 2009, 19–20). Moreover, neoliberalism externalizes ecological disasters as something "to be dealt with", for example by more "eco-friendly and pragmatic" technical innovation in the market sphere, rather than

⁴³ Quite similar remarks as Žižek made (2009, 13–15) as well.

⁴⁴ Žižek points out (2009, 12) that capitalism creates "excluded and dispensable individuals from the homeless to the unemployed".

disclosing the fact that neoliberalism's normal functioning causes ecological disasters (see Žižek 2009, 16–19). The structure of ideological fantasy again *externalizes* the Real to seemingly contingent impediments that block “the true neoliberal capitalism” from taking place, as was the case with Adam when he blamed the social democrats for spoiling his perfect libertarian society. This is how neoliberal capitalists can hold onto their big Other.

What is the subjectivity of neoliberalism like? Moreover, there is one more fact that Žižek holds crucial for contemporary ideology. It is that contemporary ideologies are no more conscious, but first and foremost unconscious. Žižek purports (2012, 18) that contemporary “‘consumerist’, post-Protestant, late-capitalist” subject is *a cynical subject*. According to Žižek (1989, 25–26), the best definition of ideology of our times is that “they [subjects] know very well what they are doing, yet they nevertheless do it”. Žižek claims that contemporary cynical subjects are fetishists in practice, not in theory (Žižek 1989, 28). Furthermore, Žižek (1989, 30) purports that cynicism is a way to distance modern subject from her or his fantasy. There appears to be a kind of disconnect between acting and thinking with these so-called cynical subjects. What could this mean?

I will analyze the structure of cynicism against the backdrop of Žižek's theory and use Adam as an example for the one last time. There was a certain naivety in the example person Adam. The example of Adam was in a sense too simple. It seems to me that not many of us really build our life stories as coherently as Adam did. The example of Adam does not seem to be a good example on “postmodern subjectivity” that is multifold and changing. Žižek purports that in premodernity, the big Other was more directly assumed and obeyed (Žižek 2008a, 248–249 & see Sharpe 2004, 57–60), but many postmodern subjects do not really believe in these kinds of “grand narratives” (Žižek 2008a, 251). I built this kind of “grand narrative” with the example of Adam as well. Does Žižek's theory consider changing and multifold subjectivities? Is Žižek's theory of ideology premodern and thus definitely not suitable for our contemporary times?

I would argue that Žižek's theory includes quite a totalistic “grand narrative” because of the (almost) all-encompassing big Other. However, Žižek's theory is not totalistic at the level *conscious* grand narratives⁴⁵. I will elaborate on this idea. Žižek compares himself

⁴⁵ Sharpe & Boucher (see 2010, 229–231) criticize Žižek that the supposition of an unconscious big Other is too totalistic. Sharpe & Boucher furthermore point out (2010, 54–55) that Žižek has also introduced the idea that there could be little Others, other persons and their evaluations, in place of the big Other. This is however not a basic concept that Žižek commonly employs in his analysis, and therefore this idea is not elaborated in this thesis.

against what he thinks as the core of Marx' theory of ideology. According to Žižek (1989, 29), Marx claimed that "they do not know it, but they are doing it doing it". Žižek argues that this is a lackluster analysis on how ideology functions in contemporary societies. He fixes the formulation (Žižek 1989, 30): "They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know".

If we follow Žižek's formulation here with the example of Adam, the postmodern cynical, neoliberal version of Adam "does not really believe" consciously in neoliberalism. If one asked from him if he was a neoliberal, Adam might even appear critical towards neoliberalism. Žižek would argue that in Adam's case, Adam nevertheless unconsciously still believes in neoliberalism and has unconscious fantasies about a perfect neoliberal society. These beliefs are disavowed and repressed, they are not conscious (compare Žižek 1989, 12). Because Adam is cynical, Adam consciously thinks and claims that he does not really believe in them.

Unconsciously structured desires and fantasies cannot be accessed directly due to their unconscious nature. One cannot just go to Adam and ask: "please tell me, are you unconsciously a neoliberal?" and get a credible answer because Adam cannot access his unconscious either. Nevertheless, according to Žižek (Žižek 1989, 28 & compare Sharpe 2004, 7), one can see the effects of subject's disavowed fantasies in action. For example, Adam might always want clothes that look businessman-like, expensive and fancy. When asked about these clothes, he says: "These clothes don't reflect my ideology in any way. I know that they look businessman-like, but I really have no ideologies regarding them, I just happen to like these kinds of clothes." Žižek would argue here that Adam knows very well what he is doing when buying neoliberally sleek, businessman-like fancy clothes, but he is nevertheless doing it because he disavows his fantasies.

This kind of behavior might point to a disavowed, unconscious fantasy of (consumerist⁴⁶) neoliberalism. A Žižekian analysis would observe Adam's behavior in order to deduce

⁴⁶ I did not cover Žižek's analysis of consumerism due to its complexity. To condense Žižek's position based on Sharpe & Boucher (2010, 139–148), I interpret Žižek's main idea to be that contemporary neoliberal subjects are consumerist as well, and this consumerism becomes a twisted duty; they not only can *enjoy*, but rather they *must* enjoy. To put the point differently, subjects are bombarded by consumerism, which is provided by neoliberalism in all spheres of life, and if there is no other framework that would provide other rules and norms, consumerist enjoyments turn into demands. As Sharpe & Boucher point out, Žižek has the conservative idea that there always must be some rules in place, provided by the master signifier because there must be a certain degree of social cohesion. In consumerism there are not sufficient rules and norms in place, and thus the enjoyments promised by consumerism *transform themselves into rules and demands* that pressure subjects. This is the reason why in consumerism the big Other is even more pervasive than in pre-consumeristic societies (see Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 139–148 for more technical and elaborate description on the matter.)

what his unconscious structure of his fantasies might be. Here the concept of *fundamental fantasy* is crucial. Fundamental fantasy means that beyond the conscious, vivid fantasy images, there is a more crucial unconscious fundamental fantasy that spawns these images and teaches us to desire (Žižek 2007, 59). Fundamental fantasy is the unconscious structure behind all the more-or-less conscious fantasies. This fundamental fantasy is as well unconsciously structured by the big Other (Žižek 2007, 53–54). Again, this fundamental fantasy is disavowed because the subject cannot access the position of the big Other and their subjectivity as such depends on not accessing the viewpoint of the big Other; they can only access themselves as objects under the gaze of the big Other (compare Žižek 2007, 53–54).

Despite being disavowed, fundamental fantasy nevertheless guides Adam's behavior (compare Žižek 1989, 80). His disavowed, fundamental fantasy causes him to act the way he acts because it teaches him to desire and acquire expensive clothes. Unconsciously structured, repressed fundamental fantasy shows in his actions rather than what Adam explicitly thinks and believes. In this case, a Žižekian analysis would claim that Adam's big Other structures his subject position as a successful libertarian man as well as his desires accordingly. However, this structuring is done in a cynical fashion, where this fundamental fantasy is disavowed.

How does the cynical structure of postmodern subjectivity fit into the theoretical framework that I constructed in this thesis? Why should there be something as a repressed, unconscious fundamental fantasy? I interpret that cynical subjectivity is connected to the idea that the subject is in a push-and-pull motion between fulfilling fantasies and maintaining a distance to fantasies' fulfillment. One way to maintain this distance is to *repress* the fantasy, which renders the fantasy not conscious at all but only unconscious (see Žižek 1989, 36). Fundamental fantasy is repressed and thus unconscious for the cynical subject. Cynical subject can thus maintain a distance to the big Other on the conscious level and avoid a conscious encounter with the Real when realizing her fantasy.

This theory of cynical subjects has at least some intuitive plausibility. For example, many subjects in the more-or-less neoliberal West claim that "I know very well that I should do more against the climate change" but nevertheless act as if climate crisis was "over a few trees, a few birds, and not literally a question of our survival", as Žižek mockingly points out (Žižek 2008a, 28). Žižek would argue that regarding our contemporary subjectivity, our realm of desire and fantasies seem untouched by the facts of climate change. From a Žižekian viewpoint, our unconscious desires and fantasies are deadlocked according to

the big Other of neoliberal capitalism that has formed our fantasies by bombarding us with consumerist fantasies that teach us how to desire (Sharpe 2004, 36). Our unconscious structures of desire have paralyzed any alternative routes of desire and action. They explain why we cannot take things seriously some things, such as climate change, that do not fit into our unconsciously structured fantasies.

Do ideologies change? After placing Žižek's theory of ideology in contemporary context, there remains the question if ideologies are static or changing. Žižek's account is rather static in a sense because every subject has their own way of organizing their desire in order to keep the big Other in place. In other words, ideologies have strong functional properties that stabilize and reproduce the big Other, which again reproduces ideological fantasies. Subjects always try to stabilize and balance their distance to their fantasies, which keeps the big Other in place.

Žižek argues that it is nevertheless possible to break free from the spell of ideology. According to him, subjects are not forever stuck in the functional circles of their big Others. It is possible to break free from the vicious circle of ideology by "traversing the fantasy" (Žižek 1989, 141–142). Žižek explains (2008a, lxxxi) that this means "fully confronting the fundamental impasse of the symbolic order". Moreover, Žižek purports (2008a, 168) that to traverse fantasy, subjects must disclose that subjects "never had what we [subjects] have lost". What I take these remarks to mean is that in order to break free from the vicious circle of ideology, subject must approach her fantasy and disclose that behind the charming fantasy image, there is *nothing* that would make the subject complete. Only then can the subject turn "the precious gift into a gift of shit", as Lacan famously argued (according to Žižek 1991, 129); turn the desired fantasy object of desire into the meaningless Real, and thus break from the chains of ideology⁴⁷.

As is usual with Žižek, there is a twist here as well. If a subject manages to break free from the big Other, the world "does not make sense" to her. Žižek holds that the subject needs a new structure of language to make her phenomenal world intelligible. Therefore, a new big Other will take the old one's place (see Žižek 1989, 58–59). All the changes are therefore from one an old big Other to a new big Other⁴⁸. As argued previously in this

⁴⁷There is an extra twist to this story as well. Žižek argues (1989, 80–81) that sometimes when subjects have traversed their fantasy, they nevertheless remain stuck in their old enjoyments, *jouissance* even without the fantasy (see Žižek 1989, 80–81 for more information).

⁴⁸ Only a person who is psychotic does not have any big Other. According to Žižek (see 1992, 76), a psychotic means a person who does not believe in the symbolic system and thus has no consistent reality.

thesis, it is the human condition that there must be *some* big Other in order for the world to make sense for subjects.

3.7 Žižek's table of ideology

After laying down the groundwork of the unconscious big Other, subjectivity, desire, fantasy and his analysis of neoliberalism, it is time to summarize Žižek's theory of ideology. I will summarize Žižek's theory of ideology by providing answers to the questions in the table of ideology, which was introduced in the previous chapter. I will summarize what ideology is according to Žižek, is ideology good or bad in his opinion, who holds ideology, why and how does ideology work, what is ideology's context, and does ideology change. This sets us up for the criticism of the last chapter.

What is ideology, according to Žižek? Ideology in Žižek's theory is the concealment of the incompleteness of the big Other, conducted by unconsciously structured fantasies. In other words, fantasies conceal the Real, the fact that the big Other is arbitrary and incoherent. In Adam's case, his libertarian fantasies conceal the incompleteness of libertarianism, the fact that libertarian society would not be harmonious, nor would it make him complete.

Is Žižek's theory a *narrow* theory of ideology if the concept of ideology refers *only* to fantasies' concealment of the Real? On the one hand, yes, but on the other hand, no. Even though not everything in Žižek's theory is ideology, Sharpe purports that Žižek's theory is "grounded in a totalistic theory of signification [--] that can thus be applied to *all* meaningfully structured human *praxes*, including written discourses [his emphasis]" (Sharpe 2004, 33). I take this to mean that in order to set up Žižek's theory of ideology as fantasies that conceal the Real, one has to first build his theory of the big Other, a totalistic theory of signification, from the ground up and place subject, desire and fantasy in it, as I outlined in this thesis. I agree with Sharpe in the sense that Žižek's Lacanian theory is maximally broad because Žižek applies it to "*all* meaningfully structured human *praxes*". In this sense, the background suppositions of his theory of ideology are *broad* because they refer to all culture in general.

There is, however, one issue with my narrow definition of Žižek's theory of ideology. The issue springs from the fact that Žižek employs the concept of ideology quite loosely in his works. One could argue against my interpretation that there is another meaning of ideology in Žižek's works as well, which can be seen when for example Žižek calls the

big Other “ideological” and uses the words “ideological field” when elaborating on the structure of language, structured by the master signifier (Žižek 1989, 14 & 95 & 108). These kinds of bits and pieces in Žižek’s works seem to point out that ideology does not *only* mean the *operation of concealment* of the incomplete big Other, conducted by unconsciously structured fantasies (as I argue in this thesis), but additionally means the structure of the big Other in general.

Against this line of interpretation I would point out that in the aforementioned passages Žižek speaks about *ideological* big Other, not the big Other as *ideology*, rendering Žižek’s meaning ambiguous: is the big Other *ideology*, or is it just *ideological* in the sense that it includes ideological deceit because of the concealment of the Real? My argument against the first interpretation is that in order to critique something as ideology, Žižek purports that one must know some non-ideological truth (see Žižek 2012, 16–17). Therefore, deception, getting the truth somehow wrong, is a necessary element in Žižek’s definition of ideology. I argued in this thesis that in Žižek’s theory this necessary deceit is in the unconsciously structured fantasies that conceal the incompleteness of the big Other. If deception is necessary for something to be labelled ideology in Žižek’s theory, I consider my interpretation to be more plausible because it includes deception in the definition of ideology, whereas defining ideology as the big Other in general loses the focus on deception. Nevertheless, Žižek is not always consistent with his use of the concept, and therefore broader uses of the concept of ideology can be argued for. In any case, I hold the deception in ideological fantasy to be the most crucial aspect, or in Žižek’s own words (1989, 45) “basic dimension” of ideology in his theory.

Let’s return to the table of ideology analysis. One can ask what the *content* of beliefs in Žižek’s theory of ideology are. Because Žižek’s theory incorporates every possible human culture, the contents of beliefs can be basically anything. What is crucial for Žižek is that the unconscious formal *structure* of the incomplete big Other remains the same. The big Other is always incomplete and conceals the Real from the subject with illusory fantasies of completeness, always and everywhere.

Is ideology good or bad in Žižek’s theory? Next, we can ask the question if ideology is good, bad, or neutral in Žižek’s analysis. Žižek does not only do a descriptive analysis but also argues that by disclosing “antagonistic” points (i.e. the Real), one is doing ideology criticism (Žižek 1989, 110). Therefore, Žižek has a critical edge in his analysis. Because of his critical edge, I consider Žižek’s definition of ideology to be *pejorative*; the ideologies he (mainly) analyzes are considered something “bad” in the meaning that they

get something epistemically wrong. Subjects under the spell of the big Other are epistemically wrong regarding their fantasies; they think that in the object of their desire there is something that would complete them, even though there is in fact nothing beyond the desire-inducing fantasy images. Moreover, this covers up the Real within every big Other.

In this sense, there is an epistemological mistake, a deceit in place in every ideology. And a Žižekian, critical analysis gives an explanation on *how* this deceit has taken place, and *why* subjects keep on believing in these illusions, why the ideology “sticks”. Furthermore, Žižek has a theory on how to break free from the spell of ideology, which is done by traversing the fantasy. Moreover, he criticizes some big Others and wishes to disintegrate some of them, such as neoliberal capitalism (see Žižek 1993, 5 & 2009, chapter 1). I will critique Žižek’s pejorative theory of ideology in the critical chapter of this thesis.

Who is ideological? Žižek has a theory of subjectivity. His basic unit of analysis seems to be the individual subject. There are some complications, though. As argued previously, Žižekian subject is not a self-sustained substance, but subject’s existence depends on the internalized structure of language and its internalized gaze, the big Other. In this sense, I argue that the basic unit of analysis is *the individual subject who is shaped and affected by unconscious*.

Sharpe argues (2004, 51) that Žižek holds a “transcendental” theory of subjectivity where subjectivity is “always presupposed by and for the construction of linguistic communication” by the big Other. Transcendental here refers to Žižek’s idea that the big Other is a necessary condition without which subjectivity nor communication in language would not be possible. The transcendental line of argumentation appears to be a recurring theme in Žižek’s Lacanian theory. I will evaluate on Žižek’s argumentation in the next chapter.

Even though the basic unit of his analysis is the subject and subject’s internalized big Other, Žižek utilizes his analysis over a range of cultural phenomena, group phenomena included. I interpret that he considers this as possible because in his opinion the big Other is always socially constituted; subjects can be born in quite similar conditions and learn quite similar big Others in similar cultural contexts. Thus, he seems to consider that his analysis of ideology is applicable to groups as well, or at least he habitually analyzes macro- as well as micro-level phenomena. He does not seem to think that there is a fundamental difference between his analysis of macro- and micro-phenomena. I interpret that

this is because he supposes that the order of the big Other structures every subject similarly⁴⁹.

Even though his theory of subjectivity as such is ahistorical and transcendental, *subject positions* can vary in different times and places. As elaborated previously, Žižek argues that premodern subject might consciously believe in a monarch, or perhaps in God, and their beliefs and desires are more conscious in this sense, whereas contemporary subjects' conscious beliefs are structured cynically in a manner that conceals the true, disavowed unconscious fundamental fantasy that nevertheless controls them. I interpreted that in the contemporary West, subjectivity is cynical in order to maintain a distance to the big Other. For example, on the conscious level I can be cynically critical towards neoliberalism, but if this does not show in my actions and I acted similarly to someone else who believes in neoliberal capitalism, this discordance between my beliefs and my actions can be explained by my unconscious fantasy. In this case, the unconscious fantasy is structured by neoliberal capitalism and it nevertheless has a grip on me and keeps me unconsciously attached to the structure of neoliberal big Other.

How and why do ideologies cause things? The explanatory question “how and why do ideologies cause things” can be divided into three sub-categories. Firstly, one can ask a genetic question: how and why do ideologies come about, how are they born? Secondly, one can ask the general question on how and why ideologies cause things, i.e. what is it that they do. Thirdly, because ideologies usually have this “sticky” aspect that they tend to stabilize, support and/or legitimize something, usually themselves as well, the third question is what functional properties ideologies have, i.e. how and why do ideologies function.

I will recap the genetic story in Žižek's theory. I outlined the example of little Adam who learned to think of himself as a unity through the gaze of the big Other. Subjectivity is thus from the beginning connected to the big Other who gives little Adam symbolic mandates (i.e. identities) such as “Good libertarian boy!” through which Adam begins to conceptualize himself as a subject. Furthermore, these symbolic mandates carry normative dimensions of what is considered valuable and desirable and what Adam ought to do. Žižek asserts that these meanings, values, and identities of the big Other are unconsciously always structuring subjectivity; they make subject's phenomenal world intelligible and transform subject's desires according to these structures of language. The big

⁴⁹ The question if his macro-level analysis is overly simplistic and reductionistic is not in the scope of this thesis (see Sharpe & Boucher 2010, 186 for criticism on this supposition).

Other is always incomplete and thus broken. Fantasy is the frame that teaches subjects how and what to desire. That is how the concealing fantasy formation of the big Other is born.

Secondly, I will summarize how ideologies cause things. The realm of ideology is unconsciously structured unconsciously structured fantasies. Fantasies work by concealing the fact that the big Other is incomplete. This is the main effect of fantasy.

Thirdly, concealment done by ideological fantasies has functional properties or effects. Precisely by concealing the brokenness of the big Other, fantasies lure the subject to believing in the coherence of the big Other and thus keep the subject “stick” to her big Other. Subject must maintain a distance to fulfilling fantasies because if the subject approached her fantasies too close, she might notice that there is nothing behind veil of fantasy and the big Other is incomplete. If the subject cannot approach her fantasy too closely, she cannot distance herself too far from it either because her desire is structured by the big Other.

Subjectivity is thus in a balancing act where the subject must maintain a proper distance and position with regards to fulfilling her fantasies. These push-and-pull arrangements of approaching and maintaining a distance with regards to fantasies keep the big Other in place, which is the functional effect of these factors. For example, libertarian Adam can always postpone the realization of his fantasy about the perfect libertarian society by placing new obstacles in the way of fulfillment of his fantasy. Furthermore, he must *externalize* the obstacles he has himself placed in order to keep believing in the libertarian big Other.

For example, Adam can argue that the perfect libertarian society did not yet come about because the social democrats ruined the perfect functioning of the market. He would rather place the blame on everything else but the big Other of libertarianism itself in order to avoid fulfillment of his fantasy of the completely libertarian society. Only by setting evermore new obstacles to his fantasy’s fulfillment is how he can hold onto his belief that his big Other of libertarianism is complete. Therefore, these obstacles that appear to Adam as contingent (“only if there weren’t those stupid social democrats!”) are in fact functionally necessary to maintain a distance to the realization of his fantasy. These are the functional effects that keep the subject attached to the big Other.

What is ideology’s context? As argued previously, Žižek considers his theory to be a transcendental theory that applies across every culture and in every time. He thinks that

the formal structure of Lacanian theory is the human condition. The incomplete big Other is necessary, subjectivity can only exist via the mirror stage, fantasies always deceive, and desire is always structured by the big Other.

Nevertheless, as argued previously, there are differences regarding different subject positions in different cultures and between individuals in different cultures. In my opinion, one could go so far as to claim that every individual has a particularly structured unconscious regarding the contents of beliefs and desires. As argued previously, there are nevertheless shared elements between larger sociocultural contexts as well. Therefore, Žižek considers the framework psychoanalytic theory to be applicable to individuals as well as macro-level phenomena, such as groups and cultures across different contexts.

Despite Žižek's theory of ideology being formal in structure, in his concrete analysis there are some ideologies that are more *prevalent* than others in different contexts. Neoliberalism is the most prevalent ideology in the contemporary West. It includes ideological fantasies that externalize the Real of neoliberalism itself. These Real of neoliberalism are for example ecological crisis and Third World exploited underclasses. Subjectivity of neoliberalism is cynically structured: there is a disconnect between conscious beliefs and disavowed fundamental fantasies that nevertheless hold a grip on neoliberal subjects.

Lastly, because there are strong functional properties and effects in Žižek's analysis of ideology, disclosing and overcoming ideologies is difficult. He nevertheless argues that it is possible to uncover the deceiving fantasy of ideology by "traversing the fantasy", by approaching the fantasy close enough so that subject uncovers that there is nothing in the fantasized object that would make the subject complete. Encountering this forbidden Real in the fantasy makes the structure of the big Other disintegrate. Žižek nevertheless argues that because subjectivity in the structure of the big Other is the human condition, a new big Other will soon enough emerge and take the old one's place and begin structuring the unconscious of the subject in a new way.

Žižek's table of ideology

<i>What?</i>	<p>Discursive and/or non-discursive? Ideological fantasies are structured unconsciously like a language (discursively). Effects of fantasies show in (seemingly) non-discursive action</p>	<p>Narrow definition in the sense that the concept of ideology refers to fantasies that conceal the incompleteness of the big Other. Broad definition in the sense that Žižek's theory includes an analysis how unconscious and fantasies are structured, and these structures are the basis of all human discourse and praxis</p>	<p>The content of beliefs Žižek's theory can include any contents (signifiers and signified). Contents are socio-historically formed, but the formal structure of the big Other is ahistorical</p>
<i>Good or bad?</i>	<p>Bad (pejorative account) Ideology conceals antagonisms in the big Other. Therefore, ideology contains a delusion and is thus epistemologically false. Ideology is in this sense "bad". Žižek's analysis has a critical edge as well; he wishes to change some ideologies, such as capitalism</p>		
<i>Who?</i>	<p>Individual unconscious Unconscious is not directly accessible to subjects. Unconscious is socially and culturally structured. Therefore, Žižek can analyze groups and cultures as well, but the basic unit of analysis is individual unconscious. The emphasis is not on conscious agents but on the structure of the unconscious</p>		
<i>How and why? (explanation)</i>	<p>Genetic explanation Subjectivity is born in the structure of the big Other. Subjects learn to conceptualize the world, desire and fantasize according to the big Other's structure</p>	<p>Causal explanation Fantasies structure what subjects desire. Fantasies teach subjects how to desire and conceals the incompleteness of the big Other</p>	<p>Functional explanation By concealing the big Other's incompleteness, fantasy maintains subjects' belief in the big Other. This is possible only if subjects establish a proper distance with regards to fulfilling their fantasies. There always must be some externalized obstacles that prevent subjects from fulfilling their fantasies</p>
<i>Context?</i>	<p>Context? In every human culture and praxis. The formal structure is similar in the sense that there must be a big Other, which structures subjectivity and desire. Subject positions with regards to symbolic mandates (subject's identities), contents of beliefs (signifiers and signified) and desire vary socio-culturally</p>	<p>Contemporary context? The most prevalent ideology in the contemporary West is neoliberalism. Ideological fantasies externalize the Real of neoliberalism, such as ecological disaster and exploited underclasses, as something contingent and not an inherent part of neoliberalism. Subjectivity is structured cynically: contents of conscious beliefs do not disclose the disavowed unconscious fantasies</p>	<p>Change? Subjects are stuck between desiring the big Other's fantasies and maintaining a distance to their fulfilment of fantasy. Because of this push-and-pull constellation, the big Other has a self-reproducing dimension. It is difficult but possible to break free from the big Other by traversing fantasy</p>

4. Criticism

Žižek's theory and writings can be characterized not only as a descriptive theory of ideology but also as setting up a possibility of criticism of ideology. He utilizes his theoretical framework when he analyzes and criticizes prevalent contemporary ideologies, such as neoliberalism (see for example Žižek 2009, chapter 1). The question of ideology criticism is important because when one critiques ideologies, one is not just analyzing the way things are, but one is pointing towards normative potentials⁵⁰ and normative reasons one might have to build another kind of society as well as emancipatory routes to be released from the grips of prevailing ideologies.

In this critical chapter, I will focus on and criticize the ideology-critical side of Žižek's theory of ideology. In the first subsection of this chapter, I will argue that Žižek's theory of ideology includes a structure of ideology criticism that can be called *immanent critique*. I will elaborate on the meaning and three criteria of immanent critique and argue that Žižek's theory of ideology is constructed as an immanent critique.

In the sections following the first section, I will *evaluate* if Žižek's theory of ideology fulfills all three criteria for it to constitute a *credible* immanent critique. There is a separate section in the thesis for each of the criteria. I will argue that Žižek's theory in fact fails all three criteria of immanent critique because of three reasons. Firstly, his theory's epistemological justifications are not robust enough. Secondly, his theory strikes as a self-undermining theory. Thirdly, he does not provide any objective normative justification to evaluate different big Others. Therefore, Žižek's theory does not constitute a credible critical theory of ideology and offers no credible normative potentials or emancipatory routes.

There are some similar lines of criticism in the commentaries as well. My novelty is to pose these criticisms against Žižek's critical side of his theory of ideology in a systematic fashion by introducing three criteria of immanent criticism and comparing Žižek's theory of ideology to these criteria. Lastly, I will provide one possible Žižekian answer to the criticisms and thus point some directions for future research.

⁵⁰ "Normative potentials" is Stahl's formulation when he analyzes immanent critique (2013, 7).

4.1 Immanent critique and Žižek's theory

Philosopher Titus Stahl in his unpublished working paper *What is Immanent Critique?* (2013, 2) argues that immanent critique means that standards for the critique are derived from the object criticized and not from any independent standards outside the object of critique. I will expound upon this and explain the three components required for immanent critique. Moreover, in this section I will argue that Žižek's theory of ideology strives to set up this kind of immanent critique of ideology.

Titus Stahl (2013, 7) argues that in order to critique to be immanent, critique must fulfill three criteria.

1. Immanent critique purports that “standards or normative potentials do exist within social practices that are irreducible both to the actual regularities of actions *within* these practices and to the conscious self-understanding of its participants [my emphasis]” (Stahl 2013, 7). In my opinion, one can condense the question like this: what is there within social practices and why is it not clear to subjects? I will refer to this criterion as *ontological criterion*⁵¹ because it is about what there is.
2. “[--] how a critic can find out what these standards are” (Stahl 2013, 7). In my opinion, the main question here is: how does the critic know what there is? I will therefore refer to this criterion as *epistemological criterion* because it deals with matters of knowledge.
3. If these standards exist, why do they “constitute a reason for person engaged in a social practice to change their behavior” (Stahl 2013, 7). Stahl rephrases (2013, 7) the question here: “why should anyone care?” I will therefore refer to this criterion as *normative criterion* for action.

The first criterion is about there being truths that are not obvious to subjects under the spell of ideology. These truths must “exist within social practices that are irreducible both to the actual regularities of actions within these practices and to the conscious self-understanding of its participants”. Now, the crucial word here is *within* social practices; they are within ideological subjects' lifeworld, so to say. Despite being within their social practices (or lifeworld), they are not obvious to subjects because they “are irreducible” to both “actions within these practices” and “conscious self-understanding of its participants”. The crucial point here is that they are not clear to ideological subjects. There is in this sense a certain non-knowledge of these facts for ideological subjects.

⁵¹ The criterion could be more precisely be called “(quasi)ontological criterion” when analyzing Žižek's theory because Žižek does immanent critique within the big Other and supposes no access to ontological reality. I will stick with name “ontological criterion” for the sake of simplicity.

The second criterion is about epistemological justification. The question here is, how does the ideology critic know that these non-obvious truths (of the first criterion) are true and some other beliefs are false. Ideology critic must provide epistemological justification on why her account would be the correct one and why by extension subjects under the spell of ideology are mistaken.

The third criterion provides normative reasons why anyone should care; that is, if there is some non-obvious truth (the first criterion) that can be known (second criterion), this truth should constitute a normative reason for agents to act (third criterion). To rephrase the question of the third criterion bluntly: why *should* subjects *not* be under the spell of ideology; what normative reason does the non-obvious truth give subjects to not be under the spell of ideology?

Immanent critique of ideology can be considered a sub-type of pejorative account of ideology. This is because the pejorative account of ideology similarly supposes that when an ideology critic calls someone ideological, she can do this only from a point of non-ideological, privileged place of truth (see Sharpe 2004, 26–27 & Malešević 2002, 94). In other words, to invoke the concept of ideology in the pejorative sense supposes that one knows the truth, as is the case with Stahl’s ontological and epistemological criteria as well, whereas someone who is ideological is considered to be mistaken. Moreover, someone who holds a pejorative account on ideology has *normative reasons* why she criticizes some ideology *X*. The question of normative justification is the case with third Stahl’s criterion of immanent critique as well. The difference between immanent critique and other kinds of pejorative critique of ideology appears to be that pejorative critique can be non-immanent as well; every kind of pejorative critique does not have to find standards or normative potentials “within social practices” as is the case with immanent critique, but the standards could be (for example) external as well⁵².

I find the three criteria of immanent critique highly intuitive. To provide an everyday example of the criteria in action, let’s imagine that I believed that all dogs wanted to bite me. In this situation, my friend could argue that my belief was ideological⁵³ in the

⁵² On the different types of critiques, see internal and external critique in Stahl’s paper (2013, 6–7) and the following example in this thesis.

⁵³ This example, however, depends on the definition of ideology. If the definition of ideology is *narrow* enough in scope, someone could argue that my belief about dogs wanting to hurt me does not count as an *ideological* belief. For example, Ball & Dagger (compare 2016, part 1) would argue that this belief about dogs does not offer an explanation of something socially important, provide criterion for making judgments, offer social ideals for self-identification, and provide a program of social activism. Therefore, Ball &

pejorative sense (i.e. this belief would get something morally and/or epistemically wrong, in this case epistemically wrong). She could argue that dogs are not as bad-tempered as I think and do not really want to bite me. This is not obvious to me because I am paralyzed by fear anytime I see a dog. Her critique of my belief fulfills the ontological criterion because she is telling here what there really exists in my lifeworld (or social practices) that is nevertheless not obvious to me.

Moreover, she argues that she knows that not all dogs want to bite me because she has seen me with multiple friendly dogs. She points out that I would notice this fact as well if I was not paralyzed by fear whenever I encountered a dog. Her critique of my belief here provides an epistemological criterion that tells how a critic (she or even me) *can know* what there is: by being less frightened and by observing friendly dogs.

As for the normative criterion, she argues that I should give up my belief that dogs want to hurt me because I actually would love to hang around with dogs if I only did not hold the belief that they want to hurt me. Here she fulfills the normative criterion on why I should care to not be ideological, why I should give up my ideological false belief about dogs wanting to hurt me.

Overall, her immanent critique fulfills ontological criterion by telling me how things really are and why I do not notice it (the truth that dogs do not want to hurt me and I am too paralyzed by fear to notice it), epistemological criterion how she knows and how I could know that dogs do not wish to hurt me (she has seen it and I could see it as well if I was not paralyzed by fear), and a normative reason to care about this fact (I would like dogs and would love to hang around with dogs if I believed that they do not want to hurt me). Now, what makes her pejorative critique of my ideological belief *immanent* is that she does not provide me with any truths that cannot be grasped in my own lifeworld (or social practices). For example, she does not argue that the dogs I encounter are in fact alien dogs, and I would know this if I had secret alien knowledge that she possesses, and I should love these alien dogs because it is the right thing to do when there are such noble creatures around. This would be (albeit a silly example of) an *external* critique where ontological facts are not possible to acquire inside my lifeworld but are external to it (compare Stahl 2013, 6).

Dagger would argue that it is not an *ideological* belief. I will nevertheless utilize this example because it is easy to understand.

In immanent critique, the ontological fact that dogs are friendly can be discovered *within* my lifeworld. Moreover, I would surely learn to value dogs if I no longer was afraid of them. I would see how wonderful creatures they truly are. Therefore, the normative criterion follows (in this example causally) from the ontological truth that dogs are mostly friendly, and I would soon enough have a reason to care about dogs if I discovered the ontological fact that not all dogs want to bite me.

One clarifying remark is in order before analyzing Žižek's theory of immanent criticism. Stahl distinguishes immanent critique from *external critique* and *internal critique*. *External critique* gives standards "independently of all particular social practices" (Stahl 2013, 6). This was the case with my example of alien dogs: the truths or standards that my friend gave regarding alien dogs are completely outside my lifeworld (or social practices). *Internal critique* is quite similar with immanent critique, but in internal critique the critique is conducted by "norms that are internal to it [social practice]" (Stahl 2013, 6). In other words, if in the dog example I would *already* love dogs rather than discover my love of dogs only *after* being non-fearfully around dogs, the normative criterion (my love for dogs) would already be *within my belief system* and thus *internal* to it. This is not the case with immanent critique where "standards go beyond both actual practice and normative beliefs" (Stahl 2013, 7). In immanent critique, there are some standards in social practices that can be found within them that can *change* the practices. In the example, my friend's critique is immanent because she purports that if I only encountered dogs more bravely, I would notice that dogs are truly loveable creatures. This would *change* my values regarding dogs, rendering my friend's critique immanent, not internal critique.

Why is Žižek's critique of ideology an immanent critique? To return to Žižek's theory of ideology, Žižek's theory of ideology analyses the incompleteness and gaps (i.e. the Real) *within* the symbolic structure, not outside of it. Žižek's perspective is immanent; it is *within* the big Other that always-already structures our subjectivity and ways of conceptualizing the phenomenal world. According to Žižek, there is no vantage point *outside* the structure of the big Other to see "from the outside" how people are duped into believing ideological fantasies. Žižek's theory does not rely on any natural, essential, or universal point of view outside the structure of big Other (and thus his critique is not external).

Despite abandoning any vantage point outside the big Other, Žižek wants to save the possibility of *ideology critique* and therefore holds onto the pejorative concept of ideology in his analysis (see Žižek 2012, 16–17). Žižek accepts the point that ideology-critique implies a privileged position from which one can see through the ideological

mystification (Žižek 2012, 16–17). Nevertheless, at the same time Žižek supposes that one cannot say anything about reality itself (see Žižek 2012, 16–17 & 1993, 44). If one cannot have knowledge about reality itself, the privileged position of truth must be discovered *within* the big Other, rendering Žižek’s pejorative critique an immanent critique.

Žižek does provide us with a theory of language, the big Other, subjectivity as well as how desire and fantasy function within it. By utilizing these theoretical pieces, he places the illusion *immanently* within the realm of fantasies structured by the big Other. Žižek thus offers a criticism not concerning reality itself, but rather illusions within the structure of the big Other. As argued previously, he purports that behind the fantasies there is nothing that would make the subject complete, but subject rather finds the immanent incompleteness of the big Other. Thus, his account of fantasy is based on a privileged point of truth; he thinks that if a subject were to traverse the fantasy, the subject would see through deceiving fantasies and disclose that the big Other itself is incomplete. *This truth is within the structure of the big Other*, and this is the reason why I consider Žižek’s critique of ideology to be an immanent critique of ideology. Matthew Sharpe has a similar assessment when he points out (2004, 6) that Žižek’s Lacanian theory offers “a new model of immanent political critique”.

Žižek’s critique is not internal critique because he is aiming to *transform* some ideologies, such as neoliberalism. He is aiming to disintegrate the meanings and standards of neoliberal big Other in his critique and does not wish to accept them. Therefore, Žižek’s critique is not internal critique but rather immanent critique. Initially, his theory looks to set us up with the possibility of immanent critique. I will next evaluate in more detail if his theory fulfills Stahl’s conditions of immanent critique.

4.2 Epistemological criterion

I will *evaluate* in more detail if Žižek’s theory of ideology constitutes a credible immanent critique. I will begin with the second, epistemological criterion because I think that epistemological criterion precedes the ontological criterion. In other words, I contend that a critic of ideology must have *knowledge* that some *X* exists before she can credibly argue that it exists. The shorter version of the epistemological criterion is:

2. Epistemological criterion: how does the critic know what there is?

Or in Žižek’s theory: how can a subject know that there is some non-obvious truth in the structure of the big Other that is not ideological?

How can someone in Žižek's theory of ideology claim to know that she is in possession of the truth, whereas subjects under the spell of ideology are mistaken? The most obvious answer to the question appears to be that if subjects traverse their fantasy, they will disclose the truth of the incomplete big Other. To put the same in epistemological terms: the incompleteness of the big Other is epistemically only accessible to subjects who traverse the fantasy and uncover that there is nothing in the fantasized object of desire that would make them complete. Those are the only subjects who *know* that fantasy is deceptive.

Initially, this answer looks quite credible. Nevertheless, I will provide two criticisms against Žižek's account of immanent critique. I will ask a *metaquestion* by turning the epistemological criterion back against Žižek's own theory of ideology:

2. How does Žižek know what there is? How can he as a critic of ideology know that there is something in social practices, namely his psychoanalysis, that is non-obvious and true?

Why would Žižek's theory get it right rather than being a mistaken ideology itself? What kind of epistemological justification does Žižek have in favor of his theory? Next, I will evaluate and criticize Žižek's epistemological argumentation. Firstly, I argue against Žižek that he does not provide a robust epistemic justification for his own theory. Secondly, I argue that Žižek's theory of ideology is a self-refuting theory. Therefore, Žižek's theory in my opinion lacks epistemological justification and leaves us with no reason to believe that his theory of ideology would be the correct one.

My first criticism is that while Žižek's theory is highly elaborate and contains different tools to analyze subject positions, desires and fantasies in different societies, it is unclear what kind of *justification* he provides for his theory. His books are filled with anecdotes as examples of his analysis, and despite their intuitive plausibility, these are hardly convincing proofs that language functions the way he supposes, that subjectivity is enwrapped in language as he claims, that desires are structured and transformed according to language, and that unconscious fantasies have the functions he contends they have. There are fragments here and there of his argumentation⁵⁴ but it would take an immense amount of time and work to systematize his insights into more coherent chains of arguments. Because of the scattered nature of his works, some commentators claim that Žižek in fact has no coherent theory to rely upon but rather utilizes different concept for different

⁵⁴ For example, Žižek analyzes (1989, 97–105) different descriptivist and anti-descriptivist theories of language before introducing his theory of the big Other.

audiences (see for example Parker 2004, 116 & 6). I believe that there are at least bits and pieces of more coherent theory, which I have sketched in this thesis, but it would take more strict argumentative work to provide an argumentative justification for his theory.

In my opinion, one can simply question Žižek's theoretical suppositions. Why does language refer only to other elements within it? Why would there be such a thing as the big Other? Why is desire be completely detached from biological impulses? Why does subjectivity only exist under the gaze of the Other? Usually, when Žižek is dealing with these kinds of questions, he points out to other elements in his theory to justify his claims. For example, Žižek might answer that language refers only to objects within it because it makes the big Other seem coherent for subjects and gives subjects a sense of structured phenomenal reality instead of a chaotic mess. The big Other must seem coherent for subjects because if this was not so, there would be no subjectivity. Subjectivity is required because if there was no subjectivity, there would by entailment be no big Other, which makes the world intelligible for subjects, etc.

There appear to be circular elements in Žižek's thinking; he can justify elements of his Lacanian framework by utilizing other elements of the very same framework as arguments in favor of his theory. There is in this sense a high degree of coherence in his theory.

I nevertheless find these kinds of arguments problematic. According to philosopher Jonathan Weisberg in his article about bootstrapping (2012), *bootstrapping* in argumentation means "a suspicious form of reasoning that verifies a source's reliability by checking the source against itself". Žižek utilizes some premises of his own theory as a proof that some other parts of his theory are correct, and vice versa. If there is nothing but Žižek's Lacanian theory to verify that Žižek's Lacanian theory is in fact true, this indeed is "a suspicious form of reasoning" because if one only checks a source against itself, one does not know that the source, in this case Žižek's theory, is reliable (compare Weisberg 2012). Therefore, some non-bootstrapping epistemological justifications are required for Žižek to provide justification for his theory.

There is of course his transcendental argumentation as well. He seems to suppose that because things are (always-already) how they are, his transcendental theory⁵⁵, which explains why things are the way they are, is correct. Are not there any alternative explanations that could explain why things are the way they really are, except Žižek's theory?

⁵⁵ See also Butler (2000, 12-13) who criticizes Žižek's transcendental theory of ahistoricity and Glynos (2001, 16-17) who evaluates Butler's criticism.

Should he not provide more argumentation on why his theory would be the right one of all the possible theories that explain what there is? He appears to merely suppose that his theory is correct because things would not be the way they are if it was not correct. To criticize such transcendental argumentation, I argue that these kinds of arguments *beg the question*. The transcendental argument supposes what it is supposed to prove (compare Stern 2012, chapter 3). It does not provide argumentation why Žižek's theory would be true – it merely supposes that it is true because things would be otherwise if it was not true.

Therefore, Žižek's theory lacks robust epistemic justification. Circular bootstrapping argumentation and question-begging transcendental argumentation do not do the job. It is furthermore unclear what kind of justification his theory would require to be epistemically more credible. This methodological confusion rises from the fact that his Lacanian theory sits at the crossroads of philosophy, psychology, and social sciences. Žižek deploys philosophical theories about the structure of language and subjectivity. In my opinion, if he wanted to provide a strong *philosophical justification* for his theory, he should provide more explicit argumentation in favor of his theoretical framework as well as map out answers to other relevant philosophical theories and their objections to his theory (compare Rosenberg on philosophical discussion 1996, 54–55). Sharpe & Boucher (2010, 223–224) have pointed out the same tendency of Žižek to avoid counterarguments against his theory. Žižek's works do discuss with other philosophical theories but fail to provide elaborate chains of argumentation to provide strong philosophical justifications for his theory, nor does Žižek properly answer to criticisms against his theory.

Furthermore, since psychoanalysis is a *psychological* theory in some sense as well⁵⁶, the question remains if there should be a place for empirical justifications. Psychological theories are usually tested *empirically*. Žižek leaves us with nothing here but the examples he gives of Lacanian theory in his books. They are more handpicked examples⁵⁷ than actual empirical research conducted. If Žižek's theory is a psychological theory, it ought to be tested empirically as well, for example in a Popperian manner by conducting experiments that can falsify predictions drawn from the theory (see Shea n.d. & Hansson

⁵⁶ Žižek argues (1989, 32) that psychoanalysis is not psychology because it is not about most “intimate beliefs”. In the light of Žižek's theory, I take the denial of psychology of this sentence to mean that our conscious beliefs can and in fact do deceive us, and therefore the point is not only to study merely conscious beliefs but also the way subjects' unconsciously is structured and how it operates regarding conscious beliefs, for example by transferring conscious beliefs to others (i.e. the so-called Freudian transference, see Žižek 2008a, 148 & Sharpe 2004, 49 for more information). I nevertheless contend that unconscious structures of the psyche are in the scope of the field of psychology.

⁵⁷ Handpicking your evidence is listed as by Hansson (2017) as one feature of pseudoscience.

2017)⁵⁸. Whatever the right scientific criteria and the methods to test theories are, Žižek does not conduct empirical psychology and thus does not provide credible empirical evidence in favor of his theory⁵⁹.

A Žižekian could probably argue against this kind of empiricist criticism by purporting that there is no access to reality; according to Žižek's theory of language, every field of science has their own big Other and different ways to structure their concepts and world views. By extension, because all empirical methodologies and tests are only valid in their own structure of the big Other, no metaepistemology or -ontology is in principle possible. Therefore, no empirical analysis, whether in social sciences or in psychology, will prove if Žižek's theory is true or not; it is a matter of philosophical, not empirical argumentation.

As neat as this postmodernist-echoing line of argumentation sounds, there is in my opinion one weakness in it, which has been noted by the commentaries as well (see Sharpe 2004, 217 & Boucher 2008, 11–12): if there is no access to reality itself, why should we believe Žižek's *meta*claims on how all language, subjectivity, and desire function? Why should Žižek's theory be any more justified than any other theory? Does not Žižek fall into the postmodernist *reductio ad absurdum*: while he claims that there is no metanarrative, does he not cut the ground under his own theory's feet?

Philosopher Roy Bhaskar in his book *The Possibility of Naturalism – A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences* (1979, 86–87) asserts that one criterion of a theory on ideology is the possibility of situating the theory within itself⁶⁰. This means that a credible theory of ideology needs to provide an explanation on why it is “cognitively superior” to ideology; only from this cognitively superior point of view can something be viewed as ideological (Bhaskar 1979, 86–87). To put my criticism bluntly: why is Žižek's own theory not one ideological big Other among other big Others? Why would it be “cognitively superior” and have the knowledge on how things *really are*? Bhaskar's criteria overlaps with Stahl's epistemological criterion of immanent criticism: if Žižek conducts psychoanalytic criticism of ideology, how does he know that his own theory is non-ideological and gets it right? In my opinion, because Žižek renounces the possibility of any metanarrative or metatheory, he fails Bhaskar's criterion as well as Stahl's second

⁵⁸ See Shea (n.d., chapter 3) for more discussion on Popper's criterion.

⁵⁹ Of course, one could argue that despite Žižek not providing us with sufficient empirical evidence, perhaps some other psychoanalyst offers sufficient empirical evidence in favor of Lacanian theory in general. This is, however, a position to be separately argued for.

⁶⁰ See all Bhaskar's criteria (1979, 86–88).

criterion. His theory becomes one big Other among other big Others and is thus a self-refuting theory of ideology. This is my second main criticism against his theory of ideology.

Moreover, there is clearly a certain ambivalence in Žižek's theory. On the one hand, Žižek asserts that he does not think that there is any epistemic access to reality itself, but on the other hand his theory relies heavily on a *genetic* story of a subject; a story that includes descriptions about the toddler *before* entering the realm of the symbolic. His Lacanian account of the mirror stage theorizes about bundles of biological enjoyments *before* the structure of language. I contend that Žižek strikes to me as breaking his own rules when it comes to not referring to reality as such (before or after the symbolic); his Lacanian theory of subjectivity refers to the *pre-symbolic* realm, which his theory implicitly supposes as impossible to do. There is some ambivalence here with Žižek, and I will return to this theme when trying to provide a Žižekian defense against these criticisms.

In this section, I contended that Žižek's arguments lack robust epistemological justification. Firstly, his arguments appear to be bootstrapping arguments or transcendental arguments that beg the question. It is furthermore unclear what kind of justification his theory would require to be epistemically more credible. Secondly, I argued that by renouncing every metanarrative, his psychoanalytic theory does not do the epistemological justificatory job because by implication his theory becomes one big Other among others. Therefore, Žižek's theory strikes to me as a self-refuting theory. Because of these reasons I contend that Žižek's own theory of ideology fails the epistemological criterion of immanent critique as well.

One remark to mention is that I consider both criticisms here (lack of epistemic justification and a self-refuting theory) to be valid against Žižek's theory of ideology in general, not only against his immanent critique in his theory of ideology. These criticisms are not limited to the critical aspect of Žižek's theory but can be extended to the whole (descriptive aspects of his) theory as well. Nevertheless, because in this critical part I systematize and evaluate critical potential in Žižek's theory of ideology, I introduced these criticisms by comparing them to Stahl's epistemological criterion of immanent critique.

4.3 Ontological criterion

If Žižek fails the epistemological criterion, what about ontological criterion, then? The shorter version of the ontological criterion is:

1. Ontological criterion: what is there within social practices and why is it not clear to everyone?

Or in Žižek's theory: is there something within the structure of the big Other that is not ideological and why is it not obvious to subjects?

If we follow Stahl's ontological criterion in detail, the truth of what there is in social practices must be irreducible both "to the actual regularities of actions and to the conscious self-understanding of its participants". In Žižek's theory of ideology this means that the truth of the incomplete big Other is not obvious to participants action or to their self-understanding⁶¹. In Žižek's theory, the truth of the incompleteness of the big Other is *not* consciously self-understood and is *not* directly visible in "the actual regularities of actions" because of the deceiving fantasies. Therefore, the fact that big Other contains the Real is not obvious to the agents under the spell of ideology. Initially, Žižek's theory of ideology thus *seems* to fulfill the first condition that there is in fact something in the big Other that ideological subjects get wrong, namely the incompleteness of the big Other, and this deception is not obvious to subjects under the spell of ideological fantasies.

Despite this initial plausibility, I contend that Žižek's own theory of ideology fails the ontological criterion as well. I argue that epistemological criterion is required for fulfilling the ontological criterion. My idea here is that epistemological criterion precedes the ontological criterion; one must have knowledge on what there is if one is to justifiably suppose that something is. Every ontological argument needs an epistemic justification. Because Žižek cannot provide a robust epistemological justification on why his theory would be *the* right theory to describe what there is, then we cannot suppose that his theory is right about what there is. In other words, if Žižek has no knowledge on what there is, he cannot credibly argue that his theory is true. Because he could not provide robust epistemological justification in favor of his account that there exists such a thing as big Other and the Real within it, he gives us no reason to suppose that such things indeed exist. Therefore, I maintain that he fails the ontological criterion as well.

⁶¹ I understand Stahl's criterion of "social practices" in the broad sense here in a way that can include Žižek's account of the big Other.

4.4 Normative criterion

I argued that Žižek fails the epistemological criterion and by entailment the ontological criterion of immanent critique as well. Only normative criterion remains. The shorter version of the normative criterion is:

3. Normative criterion: why should anyone care about these existing standards that are not obvious to participants? What reason do these non-obvious standards give to care?

Or in Žižek's theory, what normative reason does the disclosure of the incompleteness of the big Other give? Why should subjects care not to be under the spell of ideology?

Rahel Jaeggi in her article *Rethinking Ideology* (2006, 69) argues that ideologies are not only an epistemic problem, but they are a normative problem as well. It is true enough that according to the pejorative definition of ideology, ideology gets something wrong, but as argued previously, the point of the pejorative concept of ideology and ideology criticism is not only to analyze ideologies but to *transform the world* as well (compare Jaeggi 2006, 69). This is the case with immanent pejorative critique as well.

Commentaries have pointed out that Žižek does not, and in fact his theory cannot provide any criteria why, normatively speaking, anyone should care about not being under the spell of ideology (see Sigurdson 2016, 99–102 & Boucher 2008, 217–218). This is in my opinion because Žižek's theory can only analyze normative criteria that subjects already hold within the structure of the big Other. His theory thus provides no justifications in favor of any *transformative* normative criterion, a criterion not already held by subjects in their particular big Others.

Žižek nevertheless seems in his criticisms against capitalism to insist that traversing the fantasies of capitalism and disintegrating the big Other of capitalism is valuable. He has gone so far as to argue that even our survival as a human species depends on traversing the fantasy of capitalism in the face of ecological disaster (Žižek 1993, 5). Nevertheless, philosophically speaking, Žižek's theory offers no external or immanent normative criteria (with regards to the big Other) why any normative reasons should be more valuable than others and why should traversing the fantasy be more valuable than remaining charmed by the illusion of it. Why should, for example, subjects within the neoliberal big Other traverse its fantasy? Why should some big Other, for example communism, be better than some other big Other, for example capitalism?

Theologian Ola Sigurdson in the article *A Hermeneutic of Hope: Problematising Žižek's Apocalypticism* (2016, 99–102) critiques Žižek of "decisionism" when pointing out this problem with his account; if there are no normative criteria whatsoever to decide if one should "leap into the void" (i.e. disclose the Real) or not, normative criteria become a matter of arbitrary decision. Sharpe and Boucher (2010, 85) agree that Žižek denies "*any attempt to propose a prescriptive politics* [their emphasis]" and thus does not have any normative criteria. In my opinion, this opinion of Žižek's is visible when Žižek contends that the position of ideology criticism "*cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality* – the moment we yield to this temptation, we are back in ideology [his emphasis]" (Žižek 2012, 17). I interpret that if there is no "positively determined reality" whatsoever, this means that there are no (objective) normative criteria in his theory either.

If a subject under the big Other of capitalism traverses the fantasy of the big Other and her big Other of capitalism falls apart, there will nevertheless be a new ideology in place for the subject. This is because Žižek considers these duping ideologies of the big Other to be the human condition. He argues that an illusory fantasy of some kind is necessary, whether it be an illusion of capitalist big Other or an illusion of some other big Other. If this is truly so, Žižek would in my opinion have to provide normative criteria why living under the spell of some ideological illusions is better than living under the spell of others. Otherwise, his analysis of ideology remains on the level of description and does not reach the level of a *critique* if we are to follow Stahl's normative criterion of immanent criticism.

To summarize my normative critique: Žižek's criticism of ideology, which stresses exposing the Real in every big Other, makes his account of ideology pejorative and critical because it offers a route to emancipation from the deceptive grip of ideology. The further question of course is why *should* subjects be released from ideology X or ideology Y, and which one of these is better than the others and why. Žižek's theory leaves us with no normative criteria here. Geoff Boucher asserts (2008, 218) in his critical assessment that Žižek's theory promotes "metaphysical radicalism of irrationality and relativism." When it comes to normative criteria, I tend to agree with his assessment.

In this critical chapter, I outlined Stahl's three criteria of immanent criticism and argued that Žižek fails all these criteria. To simplify the criteria, the criteria are

1. Ontological criterion: is there something in the structure of the big Other that is not ideological and why is it not obvious to everyone?

2. Epistemological criterion: how can one know that there is some non-obvious truth in the structure of big Other that is not ideological?
3. Normative criterion: why should we care about this fact?

I argued that Žižek's theory does not provide robust epistemological argumentation in favor of his theory. Firstly, his arguments appear to be bootstrapping arguments or transcendental arguments that beg the question. Secondly, I argued that by renouncing every metanarrative, his psychoanalytic theory does not do the epistemological justificatory job because by implication his theory becomes one big Other among others. Because of these reasons, I argued that we have no epistemic reason to agree with his (ontological) psychoanalytic analysis. Lastly, I argued that Žižek does not provide us any normative justificatory criteria on why exposing ideologies would be valuable and why should we value some big Others more highly than others. Therefore, Žižek in my opinion fails the third, normative criterion as well and is thus not a credible, critical theory of ideology.

4.5 Žižekian answers to criticisms

In this last section of the thesis, I will sketch a beginning of a Žižekian answer against some of the criticisms above. I will argue that Žižek could take a decisive step into *ontology* if he is to provide us with a metatheory and thus perhaps evade some of the criticisms outlined above.

Žižek is ambiguous when analyzing the pre-symbolic and symbolic structures (i.e. the big Other). He claims that “symbolic structures are always as if they always already-were” (see Žižek 1994, 39) on the one hand. Nevertheless, as argued previously, his theory includes pre-symbolic elements within it on the other hand. For example, he thinks that the birth of the big Other makes the anxiety disappear for the *pre*-subject (see Žižek 1993, 92–93 & 2008a, 265–266).

He appears to notice this ambivalence at hand as well. When theorizing about the genesis of structure of language, he argues that the starting point is “[--]mythical, quasi-natural starting point of immediate *need* – the point which is always-already *presupposed*, never given, “posited,” experienced“ as such [his emphasis]” and it includes things like thirst and hunger. (Žižek 1993, 120). Elsewhere, Žižek purports that “this [birth of unconscious] absolute beginning is never made in the present: its status is that of a pure presupposition, of something which always-already took place” (Žižek 2001, 147). Žižek therefore appears on the one hand to notice that when he describes anything before or without the

structure of language, such as natural biological thirst, hunger, or the world without the unconscious structuring it, he does not have knowledge of what there is *per se*, but rather employs concepts such as “mythical starting point” and “pure presuppositions”, whatever those concepts mean.

On the one hand, Žižek moreover argues that the Real is “the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolization [--] which in a sense *precedes* the symbolic order [i.e. the big Other]” and it includes “[--]the fullness of the Real of the living body” (Žižek 1989, 191). On the other hand, the Real is moreover “structured by it [the big Other] when it gets caught in its network” (Žižek 1989, 191). Žižek here points out the dual meanings of the Real. On the one hand, the Real is posited as the presupposition of the process of symbolization and on the other as it’s leftover (see Sharpe 2004, 162).

Something seems to be off. The Real is both “the living body” as a substance, a thing that exists without relying on the structure of the big Other, as well as something that is only generated by the gaps in the structure of the big Other. Which one is it, or is it both, as Žižek here supposedly suggests? And if the Real is ontological, how can Žižek again have knowledge concerning it because his claim “the Real exists” is made from *within* the linguistic structure of the psychoanalytic big Other?

A postmodern solution? One could argue that this ambivalence is deliberately intended to be a part of Žižek’s theory. According to this interpretation, we can conceive Žižek’s Lacanian theory as one incomplete, incoherent big Other among other incoherent big Others. According to Žižek (1992, 116), Jacques Lacan once denounced that “those who love him” should have fidelity to him. Žižek seems to suggest here that Lacan and his psychoanalysis can be considered as one big Other. This is because this “fidelity” at work here is the same fidelity that is at work when subjects under ideology suppose that the big Other guarantees of the consistency of their beliefs⁶² (see Žižek 1992, 116).

This passage can thus be interpreted that Žižek does a similar turn as Lacan did: those who love Žižek, make his Lacanian psychoanalytic theory their big Other and can analyze the world in the manner he proposes. The theory of Žižek is one big Other and is thus incomplete as well. From this perspective, it is only fitting that there are contradictions

⁶² Žižek puts this point in more technical language by arguing that (1992, 116) Lacan’s theory “sustains itself only through the transferential relationship to its founder”. Transference means that the big Other is supposed to be coherent (Žižek 2008a, 148 & Sharpe 2004, 49). Therefore, there is transference with regards to Lacan as well as transference with regards to the big Other. Lacan can be therefore be interpreted as one big Other.

of the Real in the middle of the big Other, in the groundwork of psychoanalytic theory itself because every big Other is incomplete. In this reading, this is the reason why all parts of the psychoanalytic theory do not fit; psychoanalytic theory is supposed at the same time as an ontological metatheory as well as one ideological big Other among others. Therefore, Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalysis is contradictory, and this reading suggests that Žižek knows it as well. To support this reading, Žižek has moreover called for (1994, 183) psychoanalysis for constant questioning of its own position.

This is therefore a truly postmodern solution: Žižekian psychoanalytic theory is under siege from itself and thus breaks itself down in the end. If there is no objective access to reality, Žižek's theory that tells us that "there is no objective access to reality" is in no way more justified than any other theory. A postmodern solution if there was any, but perhaps not a satisfactory one for those who would prefer for Lacanian-Žižekian psychoanalytic theory of ideology to provide us with objective ontological, epistemological, or normative criteria.

There are nevertheless reasons to oppose this "postmodern" reading of Žižek. Žižek explicitly opposes what he calls postmodernism and post-structuralism because he purports that they suppose that we live in a "post-ideological" condition (Žižek 1989, xxxi). Žižek contends that according these so-called postmodernist and post-structuralist views, there are no universal truths, no objective point of reference from which something can be judged as false and ideological (Žižek 1989, 171–176). Žižek contends (1989, 171–176) that this kind of postmodernist thinking does not take into account the Real. In other words, postmodernist "non-ideological" viewpoint misses the Real in every big Other, the Real that fantasies conceal. Žižek purports (2008a, 102) that there is an "'unhistorical" traumatic kernel", the Real that returns in every big Other. Every big Other is incomplete and contains the Real. The upshot is that Žižek holds that there is thus the universal, objective fact of the Real in every big Other that cannot be relativized. Therefore, I suggest that Žižek does not take on a postmodern approach in his theory; he wants to hold on to the supposition that the Real is always in every big Other, and the fact of the Real is not a matter of perspective.

An ontological solution? If the postmodern solution does not seem to cut it, what about an ontological solution then? I previously argued that the concept of the Real immanent to every big Other supposes a psychoanalytic metatheory. To rephrase the point, one can only argue that there exists such a thing as the Real from the standpoint of a Žižekian-Lacanian psychoanalytic metatheory. Therefore, Žižek's deadlock remains: every

metatheory or -narrative is incomplete and only refers to meanings within itself, but psychoanalysis is thought of as *the* metatheory to explain all other phenomena.

I will introduce one last resolution attempt for Žižek out of his own deadlock. I will argue that the way out of this deadlock is to *ontologize* Žižek. There have been attempts to provide interpretations of ontologized Žižek (see Johnston 2008 and Hamza & Ruda 2016). The language employed in these interpretations is rather complex but the main idea is that if the *ontological reality* is incomplete, that is it contains the Real, then there is room for autonomous action (compare Carew 2011, 5–6; Johnston 2008, 9–10 & Pluth 2016, 107). In other words, if the reality is not causally closed (i.e. everything that happens is not caused by a necessary, physical chain of cause and effect alone), there is thus a possibility for non-epiphenomenal emergent ontological levels to exist, such as consciousness and the structure of language that can have some kind of causal powers as well (compare Moore n.d., chapter 2). In other words, the main idea seems to be that if causes and effects in physics are incomplete (they contain the Real as well), there could be emergent ontological levels, such as consciousness that can have causal powers of its own. According to this view, not every cause and effect happen on the level of physics. This is an *ontologized* theory of the Real because it does not only suppose that the Real is within the structure of the big Other but rather in the physical structure of reality itself. Moreover, this kind of ontological theory could make Žižek's theory of language and subjectivity ontologically possible.

In my opinion, one of the possible ways to argue for Žižek's theory of ideology against the postmodernist *reductio ad absurdum* could be to ontologize his theory. For example, Adrian Johnston in his book *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (2008) takes on the approach of ontologized Žižek and argues that Žižek's transcendent theory of subjectivity is possible because of his underlying ontology that includes the Real (Johnston 2008, 287). Put differently, Johnston thinks that Žižek's whole Lacanian theory of subjectivity is grounded in ontology. In his view, the Real is not only a result of our structure of language but exists in reality as well. By ontologizing his theory, Žižek could perhaps argue against the criticism of *reductio ad absurdum* and purport that his psychoanalytic theory has *objective knowledge regarding reality*, whereas subjects under the fantasy spells of big Others are ideological. Providing a fleshed out ontological theory looks like a step in the right direction. Naturally, Žižek would have to provide us with some robust epistemological justification in favor of his theory as well as normative criteria if he is to maintain a critical edge in his analysis.

This attempt of a solution, however, transforms Žižek's critical theory of ideology from an immanently critical theory of ideology to some extent into an externally critical theory of ideology as well: the non-obvious truths would be no longer only within (immanently) the big Other but also (externally) in reality as well. External critique surely has its own problems⁶³, but I would nevertheless suggest this route in order to provide a solid ontological grounding against the criticism of self-undermining *reduction ad absurdum* mapped out in this thesis.

In his later writings (for example Žižek 2013) Žižek has crafted his dialectical materialist theory, so perhaps there is an ontology in place. Nevertheless, an analysis of ontology of dialectical materialism is outside the scope of this thesis. Mapping out Žižek's dialectical materialism is a long and arduous task because of the sheer amount of his literary corpus and the fragmentary nature of his argumentation. Therefore, further research is in order if one is to provide a full-fledged, ontological and epistemologically justified defense of Žižek's theory of ideology against the criticisms elaborated in this thesis.

5. Conclusions

In the first main chapter of this thesis, I laid down a framework of ideology analysis. I argued that one can map theories of ideology by asking these questions:

- What is ideology?
- Is ideology good or bad?
- Who is ideological?
- How and why does ideology cause things?
- What is ideology's context?

Furthermore, I provided a few preliminary distinctions on how theories of ideology can respond to these questions. In the second main chapter, I defined and analyzed Žižek's theory by providing an answer to the questions presented above. Here is a short summary of Žižek's answers.

What is ideology? According to Žižek, ideology is the concealment of the incompleteness of the big Other, conducted by unconsciously structured fantasies. In other words, fantasies conceal the Real, the fact that the big Other is arbitrary and incoherent.

⁶³ One of the main questions is if there is such a thing as "the truth" to be found, and how can the ideology critic know what this truth really is (on elaboration and evaluation on these questions, see Malešević 2002, 92-98).

Is ideology good or bad? Žižek employs the concept of ideology pejoratively; he thinks that ideological fantasies deceive. In this sense ideology is “bad”. Žižek’s analysis has a pejorative, critical edge because he considers that it is valuable to disintegrate and transform some ideologies, such as capitalism.

Who is ideological? Individual subjects are ideological because of their unconsciously structured fantasies. The emphasis is on the level of unconscious structures that create ideological fantasies.

How and why does ideology cause things? Subjectivity and unconscious are structured when subjects learn to conceptualize the world, their identity, and desire according to the structures of the big Other. Fantasy has functional effects because it conceals the big Other’s incompleteness, maintaining subject’s belief in the completeness of the big Other. Subjects cannot approach fulfilling their fantasies too close because they might disclose the fact that fantasies cannot complete them. By disclosing the emptiness of fantasies, the big Other will not appear coherent for subjects anymore and will disintegrate. Therefore, in order to the big Other to remain intact, there always must be seemingly contingent obstacles in place that prevent subjects from fulfilling their fantasies.

What is ideology’s context? Žižek’s formal theory is applicable to every human culture and praxis. The formal structure is similar with regards to the big Other, structures of subjectivity and desire. Subject positions with regards to symbolic mandates (subject’s identities) and contents of beliefs (signifier and signified) as well as contents of desire vary socio-culturally. The most prevalent ideology in the contemporary West is neoliberalism. Ideological fantasies externalize the Real of neoliberalism, such as ecological disaster and exploited underclasses, as something contingent and not an inherent part of neoliberalism. Subjectivity is structured cynically; contents of conscious beliefs do not disclose the real, disavowed unconscious fantasies.

Due to the deception that maintains subject’s belief in the big Other, change is difficult. Subjects are stuck between desiring the big Other’s fantasy and maintaining a distance to the fulfilment of fantasies. Because of this push-and-pull constellation, the big Other has a self-reproducing dimension. It is difficult but possible to break free from the big Other by traversing fantasy: by approaching the fantasies and disclosing that fantasies cannot complete subjects.

In the critical chapter of this thesis, I argued that in order to constitute a credible critical theory of ideology, Žižek's theory has three criteria of immanent critique to fulfill, outlined by Titus Stahl. These criteria are

1. Ontological criterion (what there is within social practices),
2. Epistemological criterion (how does one know what there is), and
3. Normative criterion (why should we care)

I argued that Žižek's theory of ideology itself fails the epistemological criterion because of two reasons. Firstly, Žižek's very own theory lacks robust epistemological argumentation: his arguments appear to be bootstrapping arguments or question-begging transcendental arguments. Moreover, it is not certain what kind of evidence he provides in favor of his theory. Secondly, his theory strikes me as a self-refuting theory. This is because on the one hand, Žižek supposes that subjects cannot know reality, but on the other hand he supposes that his psychoanalytic theory describes the way things really are.

I argued that because Žižek fails the epistemological criterion, he fails the ontological criterion as well. Because Žižek's theory lacks proper epistemological argumentation, he cannot justifiably argue that his psychoanalytic theory knows how things really are, namely that the non-ideological truth of the Real exists. Lastly, I criticized that Žižek's theory does not give us objective normative criterion on why we should care if one is under the spell of ideology and why should we value some ideologies more highly than others.

In my opinion, to avoid the criticism of his theory being self-undermining, Žižek's theory could be *ontologized*. If he purported that the Real does not only exist *within* the structure of the big Other and its gaps but also in reality as well, he might be able to provide us with an objective ontological foundation for building his critical theory of ideology. I concluded that by ontologizing his theory, Žižek could perhaps argue against the criticisms by purporting that his psychoanalytic theory has objective knowledge regarding reality and other subjects under the fantasy spells of big Others nevertheless remain ideological. This is, however, a question for further research.

6. Bibliography

Abercrombie, Nicholas, Hill, Stephen & Turner, Bryan S. (2012[1983]): “Determinacy and Indeterminacy in the Theory of Ideology”. In Žižek, Slavoj (edit.) (2012): *Mapping Ideology*. Paperback edition. Verso, London, 152–166. (Original work in *New Left Review* 142, 11/12).

Abercrombie, Nicholas & Turner, Bryan S. (1978): “The dominant ideology thesis*”. *British Journal of Sociology* Vol 29, No 2, 149–170. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/589886?seq=1> (26.4.2020)

Althusser, Louis (2012[1984]): “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”. In Žižek, Slavoj (edit.) (2012): *Mapping Ideology*. Paperback edition. Verso, London, 100–140. (This translation from Althusser, Louis: *Essays on Ideology*, Verso, London. Original work *La Pensée* published 1970).

Ball, Terence & Dagger, Richard (2016): *Ideals and Ideologies – A Reader*. Ninth edition. Routledge, Abingdon.

Bhaskar, Roy (1979): *The Possibility of Naturalism – A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences*. The Harvester Press, Sussex.

Blackburn, Simon (2016): “Structuralism”. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-2975> (25.3.2020)

Boltanski, Luc & Chiapello, Eve (2005): “The New Spirit of Capitalism”. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 18, 161–188. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10767-006-9006-9> (25.3.2020)

Boucher, Geoff (2008): *The Charmed Circle of Ideology – A Critique of Laclau & Mouffe, Butler & Žižek*. re.press, Melbourne.

Buchanan, Ian (2010): “mirror stage (*stade du miroir*)” *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919-e-452> (5.5.2020)

Butler, Judith (2000): “Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism”. In Butler, Judith, Laclau, Ernesto & Žižek, Slavoj (edit.) (2000). *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality – Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Verso, London.

Carew, Joseph (2011): “Slavoj Žižek and the Ontology of Political Imagination”. *International Journal of Žižek Studies* Vol 5, No 3, 1–25. <https://www.zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/506> (25.3.2020)

Eagleton, Terry (1991): *Ideology – An Introduction*. Verso, London.

Freeden, Michael (2003): *Ideology – A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Freeden, Michael (2006): "Ideology and political theory". *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol 11, No 1, 3–22. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13569310500395834> (26.4.2020)
- Geuss, Raymond (1981): *The Idea of a Critical Theory – Habermas and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Glynos, Jason (2001): "The grip of ideology: a Lacanian approach to the theory of ideology". *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6(2), 191–214. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13569310500395834> (17.4.2020)
- Goldthorpe, J. E. (1985): *An Introduction to Sociology*. Third edition. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/an-introduction-to-sociology/D6F837857A4072D6DB921376EE38158C> (7.4.2020)
- Hall, Stuart (1988): "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists." In Nelson, Cary & Grossberg, Lawrence (edit.) (1988): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan Education, Hampshire, 58–74.
- Hamza, Agon & Ruda, Frank (edit.) (2016): *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.
- Hill, Rod & Myatt, Anthony (2010). *The Economics Anti-Textbook: A Critical Thinker's Guide to Microeconomics*. Zed Books, London.
- Jaeggi, Rahel (2009): "Rethinking Ideology". In Boudewijn de Bruin & Christopher F. Zurn (edit.) (2009): *New Waves in Political Philosophy*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 63–86.
- James, William (1918): *The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I*. Henry Holt and Company, New York. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/57628/57628-h/57628-h.htm> (8.4.2020)
- Johnston, Adrian (2008): *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*. Northwestern University Press, Illinois.
- Lacan, Jacques (2012[1968]): "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience". In Žižek, Slavoj (edit.) (2012): *Mapping Ideology*. Paperback edition. Verso, London, 93–99. (This translation from *New Left Review* 51, 09/10).
- Laclau, Ernesto & Mouffe, Chantal (2014): *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Second edition. Verso, London.
- Liljenström, Hans & Svedin, Uno (2005): *Micro, meso, macro – addressing complex systems couplings*. World Scientific Publishing Co., Hackensack.
- Little, Daniel (1991): *Varieties of Social Explanation – An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science*. Westview Press, Colorado.
- Locke, Terry (2004): *Critical discourse analysis*. Continuum, London.

Malešević, Siniša (2002): “Rehabilitating Ideology after Poststructuralism”. In MacKenzie, Iain M. & Malešević, Siniša (edit.) (2002): *Ideology after poststructuralism*. Pluto Press, London, 87–110.

Marx, Karl (1988): *Capital – A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I. Book One: The Process of Production of Capital*. Translators Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling. Marxists Internet Archive. (Original work *Das Kapital – Kritik der politischen Oekonomie. Buch I: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals* published 1867). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> (8.5.2020)

Marx, Karl (1999): *Capital – A Critique of Political Economy. Volume III. The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*. Translator Institute of Marxism-Leninism, USSR, 1959. Marxists Internet Archive. (Original work *Das Kapital – Kritik der politischen Oekonomie. Buch III: Der Gesamtprozess der kapitalistischen Produktion* written 1863–1883, published 1894). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-III.pdf> (8.4.2020)

Marx, Karl (2000): *A Critique of The German Ideology*. Translators Tim Delaney & Bob Schwartz. Marxists Internet Archive. (Original work *Die deutsche Ideologie* written 1845–1846, published 1932). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf (7.4.2020)

Maynard, Jonathan Leader (2017): “Ideological Analysis”. In Blau, Adrian (edit.) (2017): *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*. Cambridge University Press, 297–324. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316162576.015> (25.3.2020)

Miron, Jeffrey A. (2009): “Bailout or Bankruptcy? A Libertarian Perspective on the Financial Crisis”. In FAS Scholarly Articles. Harvard, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4319665> (9.4.2020)

Moore, Dwayne (n.d.): “Mind and the Causal Exclusion”. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/causal-e/#H2> (24.4.2020)

Morris, Warren Frederick (2010): *Understanding Ideology*. University Press of America, Plymouth.

Myers, Tony (2003): *Slavoj Žižek*. Routledge, London.

Parker, Ian (2004): *Slavoj Žižek – A Critical Introduction*. Pluto Press, London.

Patomäki, Heikki (2013): *The Great Eurozone Disaster – From Crisis to Global New Deal*. Translator James O'Connor. Zed Books, London. (Original work *Mitä globalisaation jälkeä?* published 2012).

Pluth, Ed (2016): “Natural Worlds, Historical Worlds, and Dialectical Materialism”. In Hamza, Agon & Ruda, Frank (edit.) (2016): *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.

Rehmann, Jan (2013): *Theories of Ideology – The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*. Brill, Leiden.

- Rosenberg, Jay F. (1996): *The Practice of Philosophy – A Handbook for Beginners*. Third edition. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.
- Sharpe, Matthew (2004): *Slavoj Žižek – A Little Piece of the Real*. Ashgate Publishing, Burlington.
- Sharpe, Matthew & Boucher, Geoff (2010): *Žižek and Politics – a Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Shea, Brandon (n.d.): “Karl Popper: Philosophy of Science”. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/pop-sci/> (10.4.2020)
- Sigurdson, Ola (2016): A Hermeneutic of Hope: Problematising Žižek’s Apocalypticism”. *International Journal of Žižek Studies* Vol 10, No 2, 83–103. <https://zizekstud-ies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/959/0> (25.3.2020)
- Stahl, Titus (2013): “What is Immanent Critique?”. Unpublished script, University of Groningen. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2357957 (25.3.2020)
- Stern, Robert A. (2019): “Transcendental Arguments”. In Zalta, Edward N. (edit.) (2019): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2019 edition. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/> (25.3.2020)
- Taylor, Paul A. (2010): *Žižek and the Media*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Therborn, Göran (1980): *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*. Verso, London.
- “Tree”. Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree> (30.4.2020).
- Van der Vossen, Bas (2019): “Libertarianism”. In Zalta, Edward N. (edit.) (2019): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2019 edition. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/libertarianism/> (8.4.2020)
- Weisberg, Jonathan (2012): “The Bootstrapping Problem”. *Philosophy Compass* Vol 7, No 9, 597–610. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2012.00504.x> (25.3.2020)
- Wood, Kelsey (2012): *Žižek – A Reader’s Guide*. Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989): *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1991): *Looking Awry – An introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. October Books, Cambridge.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1992): *Enjoy Your Symptom! – Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*. Routledge, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1993): *Tarrying with the Negative*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1994): *The Metastases of Enjoyment – Six Essays on Woman and Causality*. Verso, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2001): *On Belief*. Routledge, London.

- Žižek, Slavoj (2007): *How to Read Lacan*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008a): *For They Know Not What They Do – Enjoyment As A Political Factor*. Radical Thinkers Series edition. Verso, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008b): *The Plague of Fantasies*. Second edition. Verso, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2009): *Violence – Six Sideways Reflections*. Paperback edition. Profile Books, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2012[1989]): “The Spectre of Ideology”. In Žižek, Slavoj (edit.) (2012): *Mapping Ideology*. Paperback edition. Verso, London, 1–33. (Original work *The Sublime Object of Ideology* published 1989).
- Žižek, Slavoj (2013): *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso, London.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2015): *Absolute Recoil – Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso, London.